4 in illegal Guam transport plead not guilty. PAGE 2
OAG has yet to charge Maratita. PAGE 3

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Hafa Adai!

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THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

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'Regaining access to China market only possible with DOT exemption'

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Delegate Gregorio "Kilili" C. Sablan has gotten behind the Commonwealth Ports Authority's request for the U.S Department of Transportation to exempt the CNMI from DOT's China Part 213 Order that caps the number of flights from China to the entire United States and its territories.

That order limits the number of flights from China to the entire United States to a little over 24 a month.

In a letter to Transportation

See CHINA on Page 4

Sablan

Camacho to Tinian PSS stakeholders: I'm here to listen

Education Commissioner Dr. Lawrence F. Camacho recently met and engaged with Tinian Public School System staff and personnel to hear directly from stakeholders on what needs to be done to guide him in accomplishing more.

The Tinian visit last Jan. 24, which is the second leg of Camacho's "listening tour," saw him speak before a crowd of close to 200 public education staff and personnel. His conversation with

See CAMACHO on Page 4

PSS

Education Commissioner Dr. Lawrence F. Camacho, center, is flanked by personnel and staff of Tinian Elementary School, Tinian Middle School, and Tinian High School, led by principals Lou Connie Manglona and Liz Perzinski.

MPLT requests Treasury for release of frozen investment

» MPLT's impounded $226,492 investment in Russian bank depreciates, now only $113,446

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

The Marianas Public Land Trust has requested the U.S. Department of Treasury to authorize the liquidation of MPLT's investment that are tied up in a Russian banking and financial services company and are frozen due to sanctions imposed by the United States as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

MPLT board chair Phillip Mendi-

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Court dismisses IPI suit vs. CCC and Palacios

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
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REPORTER

The U.S. District Court for the NMI has granted the notice to dismiss Imperial Pacific International (CNMI) LLC's lawsuit against the Commonwealth Casino Commission and

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FERDIE DE LA TORRE

Imperial Pacific International (CNMI) LLC's Imperial Pacific Resort in Garapan is seen here in this file photo.

INSIDE

BUSINESS

The Saipan Chamber of Commerce awarded the 2023 Chamber Member of the Year to the Northern Marianas College; Non-profit of the Year Award to the Autism Society of the CNMI; and their new award, the Sustainable Business Award to Caravan of Food.

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WORLD

Israeli forces disguised as civilian women and medics stormed a hospital Tuesday in the occupied West Bank, killing three Palestinian militants.

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ENVIRONMENT

Human-induced global warming, and not El Niño, was the primary driver of last year's severe drought in the Amazon that sent rivers to record lows, required deliveries of food and drinking water to hundreds of river communities.

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Local

4 accused of illegal transport to Guam plead not guilty

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
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REPORTER

The four men who were recently indicted for their alleged involvement in a scheme to illegally transport Chinese nationals from Saipan to Guam have pleaded not guilty to the charges against them.

In their first appearance in court yesterday, Yan Juan Hu Taitano, Lee Jesse Omar Reyes, Ramon Jose Quitano Sablan, and Maverick Ryan Iguel Marlik pleaded not guilty to one count each of conspiracy to transport illegal aliens. The indictment accuses them of illegally transporting nine Chinese nationals from Saipan to Guam.

The four men have since been released on unsecured bonds and were ordered not to contact one another while their case is pending.

U.S. District Court for the NMI Chief Judge Ramona Manglona scheduled a jury trial for all four men on April 2, at 10am.

Taitano is represented by Matthew Gregory, while Reyes is represented by Mark Scoggins. Sablan is represented by Janet King, while Marlik is represented by Bruce Berline.

The prosecution is led by Assistant U.S. Attorney Eric O'Malley.

According to the indictment, beginning in or about June 2023, Taitano and Reyes orchestrated a plan to transport a group of nine Chinese nationals from the Northern Mariana Islands with "intent to unlawfully enter and reside in…Guam, knowing…that the Chinese nationals had no right or authority to enter Guam."

To carry out the plan, Taitano and Reyes allegedly hired Sablan and Marlik to captain a small motorboat from Smiling Cove Marina on Saipan to Guam on or about July 9, 2023. The nine Chinese nationals were Li Xiaohua, Dong Chang Cai, Huang Xiulan, Yang Hongjiang, Weng Mei Fang, Wu Yingchun, Gao Kun, Tang Yong Bing, and Li Kun. All nine have been charged separately and have already pleaded guilty.

According to the indictment, the Chinese nationals agreed to pay Taitano and Reyes up to $5,000 per individual.

"On or about July 9, 2023, the defendants arranged for the boat to pick up the Chinese nationals at Smiling Cove

See ACCUSED on Page 4

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4 election commissioner positions are still vacant

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

Instead of a full complement of nine, the Commonwealth Election Commission currently has only five commissioners—just enough to have a quorum to conduct any business.

The Commonwealth Election Commission is mandated by law to have nine commissioners, who shall be appointed by the governor with the advice and consent of the Senate. However, in order to have a quorum, the same election law only requires five members to be present, with at least one member from each senatorial district being present.

» CEC sets general election for Nov. 5, 2024

To address the lack of election commissioners, CEC executive director Kayla S. Igitol requested Gov. Arnold I. Palacios last Tuesday to fill the vacancies. By doing so, Igitol said, the CEC will continue to ensure that CNMI elections are held with impartiality and fairness throughout the entire process.

Currently, there are three vacant commissioner positions for the Third Senatorial District of Saipan. The positions were previously held by Doris Aldan-Atalig, Jesus S. Cepeda, and Henry Emery L. Kaipat. The current Saipan commissioners are CEC chair Jesus I. Sablan and Remedio Sablan.

There is one vacant commissioner position for the Second Senatorial District of Tinian. The position was previously held by Jonathan C. Manglona. The current commissioner for Tinian is John Diego Attao.

Rota has no vacant position. Rota's current commissioners are Esther A. Yatar and Lelanie I. Manglona.

This year's general election will be held on Nov. 5, 2024.

July 8, 2024, is the first day for the submission of nominating petitions and candidacies. It is also the date designated as the last day to establish residency requirements.

Igitol said yesterday the registration process to vote is open until Sept. 6, 2024.

She said the board is planning to hold a meeting this February.

CHCC seeking additional $2.2M for medical referral

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

The Commonwealth Healthcare Corp. has requested the Saipan and Northern Islands Legislative Delegation for an additional $2.2 million for the operation of the Health Network Program, formerly known as the Medical Referral Program.

CHCC chief executive officer Esther Muña said the additional $2.2 million is needed to sustain the fiscal year 2024 operations of the NHP and return the $847,491 of CHCC's own money it earlier lent the program so it could continue operating.

In a letter to SNILD chair Rep. John Paul P. Sablan (Ind-Saipan) last Tuesday, Muña disclosed that, as of Monday, Jan. 29, 2024, the year-to-date expenditures for the NHP have amounted to $1,215,6234.

To support the NHP operations, the Legislature, through Public Law 23-09, has appropriated only $797,711 for the program. Yet based on their annualized year-to-date expenditure, Muña said the total NHP expenditures for the year are estimated to be around $3 million.

OAG has yet to charge Maratita

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
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REPORTER

The Office of the Attorney General's Criminal Division has yet to charge Joey Maratita, an inmate who escaped from the custody of the Department of Corrections while being treated at the Commonwealth Health Center.

According to Chief Prosecutor Chester Hinds, as of last Monday, no charges have been filed yet against Maratita, as they are still waiting for all reports regarding the incident. Once all reports have been turned in to his office and reviewed, that's the time they can move forward with charging him for his escape.

Hinds

The maximum sentence for an inmate who escapes from custody is imprisonment of about one year, he said.

Meanwhile, the Department of Corrections has placed two of its officers on administrative leave while it investigates how Maratita escaped under their watch last week.

DOC Commissioner Anthony Torres said an Internal Affairs investigation has been launched into the escape of Maratita, who managed to elude his two DOC escorts while he was being treated at the CHC last Wednesday, Jan. 24. Fortunately, he was apprehended just a few hours later.

In addition, Torres reiterated that an after-action plan is forthcoming. That typically involves a review of the circumstances surrounding the event to identify areas for improvement and prevent similar incidents in the future.

Maratita is the same person who allegedly caused the lockdown and lockout at the Chacha Oceanview Middle School over a week ago.

It was learned that Maratita, who has a previous court-issued temporary restraining order against him, violated the terms of his restraining order by entering the school to talk to a teacher believed to be a previous partner.

Court documents, which recount the COVMS incident, state that police officers responded last Jan. 17 at around 11:31am to a disturbing the peace, domestic violence, assault and battery, and contempt of court report at the school.

Police officer Maridel Camacho arrived on campus at around 11:34am, and spoke with COVMS principal Martha Kintol who gave details about the car Maratita was allegedly driving and informed her that the school had been placed on lockdown due to the incident. Kintol then escorted Camacho to the school's main office to speak with the person who had called police—a COVMS faculty member who witnessed the incident.

The caller told police that Maratita had been with one of the teachers in a classroom, but she (the caller) was able to get the victim to safety and away from Maratita. She added that Maratita then jumped a fence and left the campus.

In an interview with the al-

See OAG on Page 4

MPLT

From page 1

ola-Long wrote Andrea M. Gacki, director of the U.S. Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control, on Monday to request OFAC's exemption and/or license approval to liquidate two of MPLT's accounts so that MPLT can re-invest these funds in interest-earning accounts that are not being sanctioned.

As of Jan. 9, 2024, the impounded total amount of MPLT's investment with the Central Bank of the Russian Federation (Sberbank) is now valued at $113,446.66, down from its total original book value of $226,492.52, according to Mendiola-Long.

Two MPLT trust accounts—the General Fund and the American Memorial Park Fund—are affected by the U.S. sanctions.

The impounded amount for the General Fund is now valued at $101,154.66, down from its original value of $198,084,04.

The impounded amount for the American Memorial Park Fund is now at $12,292, down from its original book value of $28,408.48.

The General Fund invests the funds from the CNMI's lease of its public lands, while the American Memorial Park Fund invests the funds to benefit the development and maintenance of the American Memorial Park on Saipan.

MPLT's General Fund and the American Memorial Park Fund accounts are managed by money manager WCM International through MPLT's investment consultant, Raymond James.

Mendiola-Long said that MPLT allocated a portion of its investments in the international markets, including Sberbank, pursuant to MPLT's Investment Policy Statement and as part of its investment strategy.

He said MPLT has investments in Sberbank that were impounded and subjected to sanctions last March 1, 2022, pursuant to Executive Order 14024, which the OFAC regulate and monitor for compliance.

Once impounded, the General Fund and the American Memorial Park Fund accounts were required to be placed in segregated stand-alone accounts. Mendiola-Long said this segregation and restricted status against any action or trading remains in place until such time that OFAC allows the removal of the shares and WCM or James can re-invest the funds or trading can resume.

Mendiola-Long said MPLT is aware of the appropriate justification for Executive Order 14024 regarding the harmful activities of Russia so that its instrumentalities would be subject to the sanctions.

As such, he said, Sberbank and MPLT's investments in that institution in Russia are deemed appropriate for sanctions.

"Under our Covenant, MPLT recognizes and respects the authority of the United States to engage in such sanctions with respect to matters of foreign affairs," he said.

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

CAMACHO

From page 1

PSS personnel was aimed toward learning more about everyone's role, and how the school district leadership can provide continuous support and services.

"I came here with a clear expectation: to hear from you," Camacho told Tinian Elementary School, Tinian Middle School, and Tinian High School staff and personnel at a gathering at the THS cafeteria.

"I am not a miracle worker. But I am here to listen to you and make things work for you, for all of us in the Public School System. I will do my very best. I am reachable and accessible," he added. "On a personal level, I am with you. This is not the last of my visit but part of an ongoing engagement that will make sure you are all part of the process."

Tinian's elected Board of Education member and former chairperson, Antonio L. Borja, welcomed Camacho upon his arrival on Tinian. This was Camacho's first time to visit Tinian since being named Education commissioner on Jan. 8.

Camacho's "listening tour" aims to engage with the close to 1,500 teaching and non-teaching personnel of PSS, as part of his long-term goal of a student-centered and educator-driven school district. Meeting with Rota PSS stakeholders was his first stop earlier this month.

At the start of his term, Camacho pledged to spend his "first 100 days" listening and talking with all public education stakeholders.

He believes PSS can achieve more because it is the "home of professionals" that advocates for every child's success. "I will not spend most of the time on Capital Hill and pretend to know everything because I am a firm believer that we are all professionals who listen to each other in getting things done for our children."

'Like you'

Jan. 24 was a learning day for Camacho when he toured and spoke with Tinian students.

"What's good about Tinian Middle School?" he asked a group of students. "Everything," they chorused.

"Actually, it's the leadership class that we have here in middle school," said another student. He was referring to the Middle School Leadership Corps that was implemented by PSS in all middle/junior high schools on Saipan, Rota, and Tinian. The program prepares these students as they transition to high school's Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps.

Another student chimed in, "We need more fun [activities]."

Camacho agrees with the students. "I'm glad to be able to meet with all of you. This is what we are here for—to hear from you."

In visiting various classrooms, he shared with Tinian public school students how public education played a crucial part in his childhood.

"I also believe in our public education system. I was once a student like you," he said, sharing how he finished his elementary years at the then-San Roque Elementary School, which was later renamed after his grandfather, Gregorio T. Camacho Elementary School.

Camacho went to attend Hopwood Middle School and finished high school at Marianas High School.

"My grandfather used to drop me at school, and I am happy that my former school was renamed after him," Camacho said.

"As you can see, you can also be leaders. What I am today is because of the good education I received [in the CNMI] and because of that, I am humbled to serve as your commissioner of Education." ***(PR)***

COURT

From page 1

Gov. Arnold I. Palacios.

Chief Judge Ramona V. Manglona granted Tuesday IPI's notice to dismiss without prejudice its lawsuit against CCC and Gov. Palacios. That means the case can be refiled at a later time if the plaintiff chooses to do so.

IPI filed its notice of dismissal last Tuesday. The plaintiff did not mention why they have decided to drop their case, but a separate *Saipan Tribune* article about a recent Commonwealth Casino Commission meeting quoted CCC executive director Andrew Yeom as saying that IPI has agreed to drop its two lawsuits against CCC and others as they are in the middle of settlement talks, which Yeom has said is "making progress."

In her order, Manglona stated that pursuant to the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, the plaintiff has the right to voluntarily dismiss an action if their complaint isn't answered by the opposite party.

"IPI filed its notice of dismissal pursuant to federal rule of civil procedure…to dismiss all claims without prejudice. [The rule] permits a plaintiff to voluntarily dismiss an action without a court order by filing a notice of dismissal before the opposing party serves either an answer or a motion for summary judgment. Generally, such dismissal is without prejudice unless the notice states otherwise. Here, defendants have neither filed an answer nor a motion for summary judgment. As such, pursuant to plaintiff's notice of dismissal…plaintiff's claims in this matter are hereby dismissed without prejudice. The Clerk of Court is directed to close this action," states Manglona's order.

The original lawsuit showed IPI suing Gov. Arnold Palacios, CCC chair Edward C. Deleon Guerrero, vice chair Rafael S. Demapan, CCC commissioners Mariano Taitano, Martin Mendiola, and Ramon M. Dela Cruz, and CCC executive director Andrew Yeom in their official and personal capacities.

In it, IPI alleged that CCC and the CNMI administration deprived the casino investor of its constitutional rights by requiring it to pay "excessive and unlawful fees."

IPI claimed in its amended complaint that, acting under the color of Commonwealth law, the defendants caused it to suffer a substantial deprivation of its contract rights, in violation of the U.S. and Commonwealth constitutions.

"The regulatory fee statute imposed additional fees for doing business in the CNMI, which constitutes a substantial and unconstitutional impairment of the Casino License Agreement. IPI was and is still required to pay the $3-million annual regulatory fee as a prerequisite to exercising its existing contractual and property rights set forth explicitly in the CLA, rights for which it already has compensated [the] CNMI. In essence, defendants are double-charging IPI. The annual regulatory fees are substantial, and the impairment to the express and implied terms of the CLA is direct. The later imposed regulatory fees, Commission Order 2021-002, and the most recent demand for immediate payment by defendants effectively nullify the explicit terms of the CLA and impose completely unexpected and new liabilities and limitations on the operation of IPI. IPI has incurred and will continue to incur attorney's fees and costs because of these proceedings, in amounts that cannot yet be ascertained," IPI argued.

The defendants did not file a response as it was supposed to last Jan. 26.

CHINA

From page 1

Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Sablan asked the department to consider granting the CPA's request for an exemption, saying that allowing the CNMI to regain access to the China market would help its ailing economy recover.

This is not the first time for Sablan to get behind CPA's request. Last year, CPA requested that the CNMI be exempted from Part 213 Order. Sablan had also supported that CPA request and cited Annex VI, Article 6 of the order that "airlines of the People's Republic of China may provide unlimited scheduled air services between the People's Republic of China and Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands." However, CPA has since clarified that this provision only applies to chartered flights.

This time, Sablan's letter of support is for regular flights from China to the CNMI.

In his letter to Buttigieg, Sablan said that regaining access to the China market would help the CNMI's ailing economy, but that would only be possible with an exemption to regular flights.

"Regaining access to the Chinese tourism market would help our ailing economy recover. However, I believe this could only be possible if the Northern Mariana Islands is exempted by DOT from the limit on the number of scheduled flights from Chinese air carriers to the United States," he said.

Sablan also noted in his letter that Chinese tourists accounted for 38% of all visitors to the CNMI prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and their spending contributed significantly to the economy.

"Yet in recent years, multiple natural disasters, the pandemic, and the consequent sharp downturn in tourism have hurt the Marianas economy considerably. I recognize that DOT's action to limit the number of Chinese carriers flying to U.S. destinations was taken in response to China's imposed COVID-19 restrictions that practically shut down the U.S.-China passenger air transportation market for three years. However, now that DOT is beginning to reopen the U.S.-China market and increase capacity, I believe that flights to and from the Northern Mariana Islands should again be exempt from U.S.-China flight limitations," he said.

In closing, Sablan said he requests Buttigieg to consider CPA's application.

"I request the department's full and fair consideration of CPA's application for an exemption from the DOT's Part 213 Order 2023-8-10, consistent with all applicable laws, rules, and regulations," he said.

ACCUSED

From page 2

Marina with the goal of transporting [them] to Guam. The Chinese nationals met Taitano and Reyes on at least two occasions to make down-payments; part of which…Taitano and Reyes used to purchase the motorboat that was to be used for the trip," the indictment stated.

The indictment states that Reyes agreed to pay Sablan to drive the boat and to pay Marlik to provide assistance like refueling the boat.

"The boat departed Smiling Cove Marina at approximately 9pm with…Sablan and Marlik as well as the nine Chinese national passengers on board. The boat proceeded south toward…Guam," said the indictment.

However, enroute, the boat ran out of fuel and began to drift just before it reached the island of Rota. They all had to be rescued by the U.S. Coast Guard.

The U.S. government wants to forfeit the vessel and the proceeds from carrying out the scheme.

OAG

From page 3

leged victim, police learned that she was on her way to her classroom when she saw Maratita walking in the hallway toward her. When Maratita was a few feet away, the victim said the defendant told her they needed to talk and they made their way to her classroom.

In her classroom, she stated she and Maratita got into a verbal altercation before another teacher stepped in and took her to safety.

The victim told police that she had sought police assistance against Maratita back on Jan. 13, after he violated a TRO she had filed against him. In that incident, Maratita entered the COVMS campus and disturbed the victim's peace.

Rotary Club of Saipan Student Program

CHRYSTAL MARINO

Rotary Club of Saipan members listen to presentations during their weekly meeting last Jan. 23 at the Crowne Plaza Resort Saipan in Garapan.

CHRYSTAL MARINO

Student Jia Ross Nicado shares her experience in the Rotary Club of Saipan Student Program during the club's weekly meeting last Jan. 23 at the Crowne Plaza Resort Saipan in Garapan.

CHRYSTAL MARINO

Bank of Saipan president and CEO, Rotarian John Arroyo, shares the successes of the first Rotary Club of Saipan Student Program during the club's weekly meeting last Jan. 23 at the Crowne Plaza Resort Saipan in Garapan.

CHRYSTAL MARINO

Aspiring engineer Jayden Shin shares his experience in the Rotary Club of Saipan Student Program during the club's weekly meeting last Jan. 23 at the Crowne Plaza Resort Saipan in Garapan.

CHRYSTAL MARINO

Expressing heartfelt gratitude, Kelly Zheng shares her experience in the Rotary Club of Saipan Student Program during the club's weekly meeting last Jan. 23 at the Crowne Plaza Resort Saipan in Garapan.

CHRYSTAL MARINO

Marianas High School's Sara Keaton shares her experience in the Rotary Club of Saipan Student Program during the club's weekly meeting last Jan. 23 at the Crowne Plaza Resort Saipan in Garapan.

Commonwealth Utilities Corporation

P. O. Box 501220, Third Floor, Joeten Dandan Building, Saipan, MP 96950
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Job Vacancy Announcement

JVA No. 24-044

Opening Date: Monday, January 22, 2024
Closing Date: Friday, February 2, 2024

POSITION TITLE:	**Administrative Technician, Senior**
DEPARTMENT:	**Power Division-Transmission & Distribution**
LOCATION:	**Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands, USA**
ANNUAL SALARY:	**$24,904.00 to $33,620.00 per annum, Non-Exempt**
CONTRACT:	**Not Contracted**
POSITION(S):	**One (1)**

The incumbent will be under the direct supervision of the Power Division Manager or his/her designee.
The Administrative Technician, Senior provides administrative support services requiring a broad knowledge of the organization and provide specific support for designated organization cross-functions. Responsibilities as assigned may include preparing reports, drafting documents, staffing special projects, tracking budgets and expenditures, tracking project timelines and keeping schedules, preparing payroll, meeting agendas, and coordinating events.

Duties:

- Performs advanced office duties; organizes and maintains records; and prepares regulatory and other reports.
- Performs specialized, advanced office and administrative support activities of assigned division or specialty area; provides administrative support, coordination and project assistance to assigned management.
- Reviews, verifies, processes, prepares and distributes various documents, reports, contracts, change orders, timekeeping records, schedules, specifications, billing documents, and/or other departmental documentation.
- Provides internal and external customer service by responding to inquiries and information requests, contacting appropriate resources to gather pertinent information, and providing documents, information or specifications for required resources or services.
- Enters and maintains data in systems; retrieves and reviews system information; performs research as needed to gather pertinent data; reconciles errors or inconsistent data; makes applicable corrections and updates to maintain data integrity.
- Maintains and organizes files, databases, and records; ensures retention of information in accordance with procedures and guidelines.
- Assists in tracking budgets and expenditures, project timelines, schedules, and/or document processes; prepares and distributes status updates and document revisions.
- Reviewing and assigning work orders in system and job order.
- Maintains and prepares requisitions for inventory, supply and equipment needs; monitors and identifies resource needs.
- Performs other duties of a similar nature and level as assigned.

Minimum Requirements:
Education: Associate's Degree or, an equivalent combination of High School Diploma/GED or ABE Program AS plus three (3) years of office or customer service experience. Proficiency in the applications of Microsoft software – Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Outlook.

Knowledge of: Applicable Federal, Commonwealth and local laws, codes, regulations and/or ordinances (based on assignment); Customer service principles; Filing and recordkeeping principles; Mathematical concepts; Inventory and supplies maintenance practices; Specialized equipment relevant to area of assignment; Modern office technology.

Skills in: Interpreting and applying applicable laws, codes, regulations and standards (based on assignment); Providing customer services, Filing, organizing, imaging and maintain records and files; Preparing reports, correspondence and documentation; Managing time and prioritizing requests; Providing attention to detail; Proofreading documents for accuracy; Performing audits, identifying errors and making corrections and recommendations; Reviewing and researching account or database information; Maintaining confidentiality of records and information; Utilizing a computer and relevant software applications; Utilizing communication and interpersonal skills as applied to interaction with co-workers, supervisor, the general public, and others to sufficiently exchange or convey information and to receive work direction.

Abilities: Must have **EXCELLENT WRITING** and **EDITING SKILLS** with the ability to communicate clearly and effectively with internal and external clients; Must be able to work occasional extra hours; Must be able to work on/direct multiple projects at one time without direct supervision and be able to handle deadlines, confidential information and interruptions in the work process; Must be able to multi-task; Must be able to work well with various levels of employees, cross-functional team members and diverse cultures; Must be able to comfortably deal with ambiguity and be able to form a cohesive and effective outcome from potentially incongruous facts (or lack thereof) and individual perspectives.

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All applicants may be tested and all applicants are subject to pre-employment drug test.

How to Apply: Submit a completed CUC Employment Application, resume, and applicable supporting documents to the CUC Human Resources Department located on the 3rd Floor of the Joeten Dandan Building on Saipan, Monday through Friday, 7:30 am – 4:30 pm (Except Legal Holidays). Applicants on the island of Tinian and Rota may submit their documents to their respective CUC Administration office. Application, resume and supporting documents can also be emailed to: employment.applications@cucgov.org.

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CNMI DIVISION OF PROCUREMENT SERVICES
CNMI GOVERNMENT

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
NO.: RFP24-OPD-42400033

SUBMISSION DATE: MARCH 6, 2024 TIME: 10:00 A.M.

"BUILDING RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES PROGRAM – MICRO BEACH MITIGATION SCOPING ASSESSMENT"

COPIES OF THE SPECIFICATIONS MAY BE OBTAINED ON THE MUNIS VENDOR SELF SERVICE PORTAL (https://selfservice.dof.gov.mp/vss/) OR AT THE OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF PROCUREMENT SERVICES, LOCATED AT BLDG NO. 12552, ANATAHAN DRIVE, CAPTIOL HILL, SAIPAN, DURING REGULAR WORKING HOURS.

QUESTIONS REGARDING THIS RFP CAN BE MADE TO THE OFFICE OF PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT BY FEBRUARY 16,2024, TO planning@opd.gov.mp

THE PROVISIONS OF THE CNMI PROCUREMENT REGULATIONS, NMIAC SECTION 70-30.3-725 AND 70-30.3-730 PROHIBITING GRATUITIES, KICKBACKS AND CONTINGENT FEES SHALL APPLY.

THE CNMI GOVERNMENT RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REJECT ANY OR ALL BIDS, OR PORTIONS THEREOF, AND WAIVE IMMATERIAL DEFECTS IF TO DO SO WOULD BE IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CNMI GOVERNMENT.

/S/ ELIZABETH S. BALAJADIA
ACTING DIRECTOR, OPD

/S/ BRIEN S. NICHOLAS JR.
ACTING DIRECTOR, PS

NORTHERN MARIANAS HOUSING CORPORATION

P.O. BOX 500514, Saipan, MP 96950-0514
Email: nmhc@nmhc.gov.mp • Website: http://www.nmhcgov.net
Tels: (670) 234-9447 / 234-6866 / 234-7670 • Fax: (670) 234-9021

PUBLIC DISCLOSURE

NMHC hereby publicly discloses that on September 6, 2023, Henry Ernest U. Hofschneider, an immediate family member of Francs H. Diaz, an employee of the Northern Marianas Housing Corporation, applied for assistance under the Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) Housing Program.

Said applicant has been determined to be a member of a group or class of low to moderate income individuals intended to be beneficiaries of the assisted activity and is applying to receive generally the same benefits being made available to the group or class. Mrs. Diaz is not and shall not be involved in the handling of this grant application.

NMHC discloses this possible conflict pursuant to 24 CFR 92.356 in order to allow any interested person to comment before the application is considered for an exception under the applicable conflict regulations.

Written comments may be faxed to Fax No.: (670) 234-9451, mailed to P.O. Box 500514 Saipan, MP 96950, or emailed to cnmi-cdbg-dr@nmhcgov.net on or before Friday, February 16, 2024.

Dated this 29th day of January, 2024.

/s/
JESSE S. PALACIOS
Corporate Director

HMGP to host meeting for hazard mitigation planning

The Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, under the Office of the Governor, is updating the Standard State Mitigation Plan for the five-year period beginning in 2024.

The SSMP presents the range of natural hazards likely to occur in the CNMI, provides risk and vulnerability assessments, identifies mitigation strategies, and proposes actions to reduce loss of life, property damage, and environmental impacts from natural disasters.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency requires the CNMI to have an updated and current five-year SSMP to maintain eligibility for a range of funding and other assistance during disasters and for non-emergency purposes.

Hazard characteristics and effects may vary across the islands of the CNMI based on local socio-economic conditions and population distribution, so hazard considerations may vary among the islands. HMGP will hold hybrid meetings on Tinian, Rota, and Saipan to allow members of the public and government agencies to provide input for the SSMP 2024 Update. The Saipan meeting will include the Northern Islands.

All are welcome to attend in person or use the Zoom meeting link to attend virtually.

For those who cannot attend one of the meetings in person or virtually, please provide input on the SSMP 2024 Update through the on-line via scanning the QR code or online at https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HZHZVGQ.

Access the link or QR code to see the opening and closing dates of the survey.

To learn more about the SSMP and general aspects of hazard mitigation, please visit the CNMI Homeland Security & Emergency Management Archives/Office of Planning and Development (gov.mp) website.

HMGP looks forward to a productive stakeholder engagement for this important initiative. ***(PR)***

- Feb. 6, Tinian-Northern Marianas College Tinian Campus (Room D)
  1:30pm-3:30pm https://marianas.zoom.us/j/84517619572
  6:30pm-8:30pm https://marianas.zoom.us/j/89389621247
- Feb. 8, Rota-Northern Marianas College Rota Campus (Room A1)
  1:30pm-3:30pm https://marianas.zoom.us/j/82331972151
  6:30pm-8:30pm https://marianas.zoom.us/j/87022146628
- Feb. 13, Saipan-Northern Marianas College Saipan Campus (Pod T-1)
  1:30pm-3:30pm https://marianas.zoom.us/j/86941172354
  6:30pm-8:30pm https://marianas.zoom.us/j/83018473618

WIA announces closure of satellite office at Koblerville Youth Center

The CNMI Department of Labor, Workforce Investment Agency Division is announcing the closure of its satellite office located at the Koblerville Youth Center. The office has provided access to job training, employment guidance, and other workforce development services.

Clients can direct inquiries on employment and job training opportunities to the division's main office located on Capitol Hill or any of four other satellite locations:

- Main DOL-WIA office in Capitol Hill
- San Vicente Youth Center
- Kagman Community Center
- Northern Marianas Technical Institute
- Carolinian Affairs Office

"The DOL WIA appreciates the community's support and engagement with our Koblerville Youth Center satellite office, most especially the collaboration with the Youth Affairs Office under the leadership of DYS special assistant Delbert Pua. Our decision is part of our ongoing commitment to enhancing the delivery of workforce services to better meet the needs of the community," said Frances Torres, director of WIA.

DOL WIA regrets any inconvenience this closure brings to the community. However, workforce programs and services will continue through its other satellite offices.

For questions on the closure or available WIOA services, contact (670) 488-1720/2312. ***(PR)***

PROCUREMENT AND SUPPLY
COMMONWEALTH HEALTHCARE CORPORATION

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)
FACILITY/PLANT OPERATIONS

RFP24-CHCC/FACILITY-008

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: February 26th, 2024 TIME: 10:00AM (CHST)

"FUEL, LUBRICATION AND TESTING SERVICES"

INTERESTED PARTIES CAN DOWNLOAD THIS **REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL** FROM THE CHCC WEBSITE [WWW.CHCC.HEALTH]. ONCE AT THE SITE, NAVIGATE TO REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS TAB ON THE LEFT NAVIGATION BAR. CLICK ON THE URL FOR THIS RFP. YOU WILL BE REQUIRED TO ENTER DATA TO ALLOW US TO TRACK ALL REQUESTS FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY.

THE CHCC RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REJECT ANY AND ALL PROPOSAL AND TO WAIVE ANY IMPERFECTIONS IN ANY PROPOSAL, IF TO DO SO SHALL BE IN THE INTEREST OF THE CHCC. ALL PROPOSALS SHALL BECOME THE EXCLUSIVE PROPERTY OF THE COMMONWEALTH HEALTHCARE CORPORATION.

/S/ ESTHER L. MUNA
CHCC CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

/S/ CORA P. ADA
DIRECTOR OF PROCUREMENT & SUPPLY

PROCUREMENT AND SUPPLY
COMMONWEALTH HEALTHCARE CORPORATION

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL
FACILITY - GENERAL SUPPORT SERVICES (GSS)

GROUND MAINTENANCE SERVICES
RFQ24-CHCC/GSS-007

The Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation (CHCC) is a public corporation and autonomous agency of the Government of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). In accordance with its Procurement Rules and Regulations, NMIAC Subchapter 140-80.1-205(1), CHCC hereby seeks the services of qualified Contractor to provide Ground Maintenance Services thru RFP24-CHCC/GSS-007.

The Request for Proposals will be available on January 25th, 2024 online at www.chcc.health, navigate to the RFP tab on the left navigation bar, click on the URL for this RFP24-CHCC/GSS-007.

A mandatory pre proposal meeting and on-site assessment will be held on January 30th, 2024 at 9:00AM at the CHC Continuing Education Room right before the cafeteria. The Statement of Confidentiality will be collected prior to the actual on-site assessment.

Contractors shall submit proposals and all supporting documents to Corazon P. Ada, Director, CHCC Division of Procurement and Supply Office located at the Main Administrative Building or via email at procurement@chcc.health no later than: 1000hrs (10:00am) Chamorro Standard Time on February 26th, 2024.

/S/ ESTHER L. MUNA
CHCC CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

/S/ CORA P. ADA
DIRECTOR OF PROCUREMENT & SUPPLY

PROCUREMENT AND SUPPLY
COMMONWEALTH HEALTHCARE CORPORATION

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL
FACILITY - GENERAL SUPPORT SERVICES (GSS)

HOUSEKEEPING SERVICES
RFQ24-CHCC/GSS- -005

The Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation (CHCC) is a public corporation and autonomous agency of the Government of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). In accordance with its Procurement Rules and Regulations, NMIAC Subchapter 140-80.1-205(1), CHCC hereby seeks the services of qualified Contractor to Housekeeping Services to the Hospital, Outpatient Clinics, Dental, Executive Offices and Other Federal Programs thru RFP24-CHCC/GSS–005.

The Request for Proposals will be available on January 24th, 2024 online at www.chcc.health, navigate to the RFP tab on the left navigation bar, click on the URL for this RFP24-CHCC/GSS–005.

A mandatory pre proposal meeting and on-site assessment will be held on January 30th, 2024 at 9:00AM at the CHC Continuing Education Room right before the Cafeteria. The Statement of Confidentiality will be collected prior to the actual on-site assessment.

Contractors shall submit proposals and all supporting documents to Corazon P. Ada, Director, CHCC Division of Procurement and Supply Office located at the Main Administrative Building or via email at procurement.chcc@health no later than: 1000hrs (10:00 am) Chamorro Standard Time on February 26th, 2024.

/S/ ESTHER L. MUNA
CHCC CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

/S/ CORA P. ADA
DIRECTOR OF PROCUREMENT & SUPPLY

Commonwealth Utilities Corporation

P. O. Box 501220, Third Floor, Joeten Dandan Building, Saipan, MP 96950
Tel: (670) 664-4282 • Fax: (670) 235-5131

Job Vacancy Announcement

JVA No. 24-051

Opening Date: Monday, January 22, 2024
Closing Date: Friday, February 2, 2024

POSITION TITLE:	**Fiscal Assistant: Customer Service Representative**
DEPARTMENT:	**COA/Customer Service/Call Center**
LOCATION:	**Saipan, Northern Marianas Islands, USA**
ANNUAL SALARY:	**$19,231.00 to $22,602.00 per annum, Non-Exempt**
CONTRACT:	**Not Contracted**
POSITION(S):	**One (1)**

The incumbent will be under the direct supervision of the Chief of Administration or his/her designee.

Duties:

- Updates and verifies customer account or work order information; enters and balances payment data; prepares timekeeping records; may work in the field obtaining and entering customer utility meter information, and replacing or disconnecting utility meters and services.
- Receives customer payments; balances and records cash and other payment receipts; verifies receipts against payment system data; and prepares deposits.
- Monitors and updates customer account information; researches account discrepancies or unusual meter readings; calculates payment information for past-due accounts, new installations and security deposits; reports research findings; and/or follows up on service or work order status.
- Greets customers or receives calls; responds to customer inquiries such as account balance information, payment due dates, minimum payment amounts due or general information inquiries; refers customers to appropriate resources.
- Copies and scans documents; maintains and organizes files records, reports and accounting transaction documentation.
- Updates and maintains spreadsheet reports; prepares fiscal transaction reports or other work activity reports.
- Performs other duties of a similar nature and level as assigned.

Minimum Requirements:
Education: High School Diploma or GED or ABE Program AS plus one (1) year of customer service experience.

Knowledge of: Cash handling practices (based on assignment); Customer service principles; Basic mathematical principles; Recordkeeping principles; Safety principles and safe work practices; Applicable equipment used in field utility services (based on assignment); Modern office technology; Microsoft software applications – Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Outlook.

Skills in: Receiving, posting and reconciling payments, cash receipts or account information; Verifying and updating account or utility meter information; Providing customer service and responding to inquiries; Coordinating services with other departments or resources; Inspecting and operating field equipment related to utility usage (based on assignment); Performing basic mathematical calculations; Researching account information or discrepancies; Preparing and maintaining files, forms, reports and records; Copying and scanning documents; Updating, maintaining and preparing reports and spreadsheet tracking documents; Utilizing a computer and relevant software applications; Utilizing communication and interpersonal skills as applied to interaction with coworkers, supervisor, the general public, and others to sufficiently exchange or convey information and to receive work direction.

Licensing: Valid Driver's License with appropriate class.

All applicants may be tested and all applicants are subject to pre-employment drug test.

How to Apply: You may submit your completed CUC Employment Application, resume, and applicable supporting documents to the CUC Human Resources office located on the 3rd Floor of the Joeten Dandan Building on Saipan, Monday through Friday, 7:30am – 4:30pm (Except Legal Holidays). Applicants on the island of Tinian and Rota may submit their documents to their respective CUC Administration office. Application, resume, and supporting documents can also be e-mailed to: employment.applications@cucgov.org.

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Tel: (670) 664-4282 • Fax: (670) 235-5131
CUC is an Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer.

Commonwealth Utilities Corporation

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Tel: (670) 664-4282 • Fax: (670) 235-5131

Job Vacancy Announcement

JVA No. 24-050

Opening Date: Monday, January 22, 2024
Closing Date: Friday, February 2, 2024

POSITION TITLE:	**Fiscal Technician, Senior**
DEPARTMENT:	**COA/Billing**
LOCATION:	**Saipan, Northern Marianas Islands, USA**
ANNUAL SALARY:	**$24,904.00 to $33,620.00 per annum, Non-Exempt**
CONTRACT:	**Not Contracted**
POSITION(S):	**One (1)**

The incumbent will be under the direct supervision of the Chief of Administration or his/her designee.
The responsibilities of the Fiscal Technician, Senior may include preparing service orders, maintaining/posting delinquency/disconnection lists, maintaining ledgers, processing and filing payroll, providing customer service including review of meter readings and updating of service orders, editing reports, establishing filing and records management systems.

Duties:

- May provide lead direction and/or supervise staff to include: prioritizing and assigning work; conducting performance evaluations; ensuring staff is trained; ensuring that employees follow policies and procedures; maintaining a healthy and safe working environment; and, making hiring, termination, and disciplinary recommendations.
- Receives, reviews and verifies vendor invoices and statements; service reports; time sheets; payroll information; and/or other payable documentation; ensures completeness and accuracy of calculations and information.
- Determines general ledger account information or expense allocation information; processes accounts payable or payroll transactions; routes check payment or wire transfer information for approval; posts accounts upon approval.
- Researches and reviews account, billing or system information; prepares reconciliations of financial data; updates and maintains account or employee data; calculates and prepares financial adjustments or account charge information.
- Assists internal and external customers with inquiries or account information; receives complaints; researches issues; provides information and explains processes and procedures; recommends resolutions to issues.
- Retrieves, files and maintains records, documents and tracking spreadsheets; processes purchase orders; prepares reports, work orders and/or audit confirmations; compiles documents and drafts correspondence.
- Performs other duties of a similar nature and level as assigned.

Minimum Requirements:
Education: Associate's Degree in Accounting or directly related field plus three (3) years of fiscal support experience; or, an equivalent combination of education and experience in successfully performing the job's essential duties such as those listed above.

Proficiency in the applications of Microsoft software – Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Outlook.

Knowledge of: Applicable Federal, Commonwealth and local laws, codes, regulations and/or ordinances; Supervisory principles, practices and techniques (based on assignment); Customer service principles; Mathematical principles; Recordkeeping principles; Research methods; Modern office technology.

Skills in: Interpreting and applying applicable laws, codes, regulations and standards; Supervising, monitoring, training and evaluating staff (based on assignment); Receiving, reviewing, posting and reconciling fiscal data or account information; Verifying fiscal data and updating account information; Responding to inquiries, researching information and resolving issues; Performing mathematical calculations and making corrections and adjustments; Researching and preparing account adjustments and related documentation; Preparing and maintaining files, forms, correspondence, reports and records; Updating, maintaining and preparing reports and spreadsheet tracking documents; Researching account information and providing information regarding billing disputes; Organizing and maintaining records management systems; Utilizing a computer and relevant software applications; Utilizing communication and interpersonal skills as applied to interaction with coworkers, supervisor, the general public, and others to sufficiently exchange or convey information and to receive work direction.

• **Licensing:** Valid Driver's License with appropriate class.

All applicants may be tested and all applicants are subject to pre-employment drug test.

How to Apply: You may submit your completed CUC Employment Application, resume, and applicable supporting documents to the CUC Human Resources office located on the 3rd Floor of the Joeten Dandan Building on Saipan, Monday through Friday, 7:30am – 4:30pm (Except Legal Holidays). Applicants on the island of Tinian and Rota may submit their documents to their respective CUC Administration office. Application, resume, and supporting documents can also be e-mailed to: employment.applications@cucgov.org.

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UOG CAMPUS CLEANUP

UOG

More than 100 students and other volunteers participated in a campus cleanup at the University of Guam in Mangilao last Saturday, Jan. 27, an effort led by the student organization Triton Changemakers. Christian Gyles Ramos, president of Triton Changemakers, said the volunteers represented a wide range of student organizations on campus, including the Alpha Phi Sigma, American Marketing Association, Blue Key Honor Society, Chuuk Student Organization, CNMI Student Organization, Entrepreneur Society, Green Army, Junior Accountants Society, Marianas History Club, Pohnpei Student Organization, Public Administration & Legal Studies Society, Residence Halls, Sociology Club, Student-Athlete Association, Student Center for the Public Trust, Student Government Association, Student Veteran Organization, The Collective Dance Team, Triton's Pride Alliance, United Nations Association, and Yap Student Organization. To learn more about Triton Changemakers or to discuss opportunities for collaboration, email uog.tcm@gotritons.uog.edu.

New USDA program to help nourish CNMI, Guam schoolchildren

SAN FRANCISCO, California—To further address food insecurity in Guam and the CNMI and provide more equitable resources for island communities, USDA's Food and Nutrition Service will provide a higher benefit to Guam and CNMI families, as compared to the U.S. mainland, through the new, permanent summer nutrition program for children known as Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer. In summer 2024, families in both territories will receive $177 per eligible child in Summer EBT benefits to use to buy groceries during the summer. Comparatively, the benefit amount per eligible child in the U.S. mainland is $120 this summer.

"FNS' nutrition assistance programs have a wide-reaching impact on the health and well-being of children," said FNS western regional administrator Jesus Mendoza Jr. "This new program—and the boosted benefit amount for Guam and the CNMI to reflect the higher cost of food—will help approximately 37,000 children across both territories get nutrition they need when school is out for summer so they can grow, learn, and thrive year-round."

Summer EBT is a new, evidence-driven program that advances the goals of the Biden-Harris Administration's White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health to enhance food and nutrition security and improve food access and affordability. The program was authorized by Congress with bipartisan support just over one year ago, and Guam and the CNMI will be among the first to launch the program in its inaugural summer.

The 2024 Summer EBT benefit amount for the 48 contiguous United States was set by statute at $120 per eligible child for the summer. USDA used congressional authority to calculate a higher rate for Guam and the CNMI to ensure equitable access. Benefit amounts for future summers will be adjusted for inflation.

Summer EBT is one of three key strategies USDA is using to tackle child hunger during the summer months. In addition to grocery benefits, summer meal sites provide free meals to families across the country, and many rural communities now offer to-go or home-delivered summer meals to increase access to this vital nutrition support. Families are encouraged to participate in all summer nutrition programs available to them.

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service works to end hunger and improve food and nutrition security through a suite of 16 nutrition assistance programs, such as the school breakfast and lunch programs, WIC and SNAP. Together, these programs serve 1 in 4 Americans over the course of a year, promoting consistent and equitable access to healthy, safe, and affordable food essential to optimal health and well-being. FNS also provides science-based nutrition recommendations through the co-development of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. FNS's report, "Leveraging the White House Conference to Promote and Elevate Nutrition Security: The Role of the USDA Food and Nutrition Service," highlights ways the agency will support the Biden-Harris Administration's National Strategy, released in conjunction with the historic White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health in September 2022. To learn more about FNS, visit www.fns.usda.gov and follow @USDANutrition. ***(PR)***

COMMONWEALTH UTILITIES CORPORATION
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

INVITATION FOR BIDS
CUC-IFB-24-004

COMMONWEALTH DRIVE WATERLINE INSTALLATION PHASE I PROJECT

The Office of the Executive Director, Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) is soliciting competitive sealed bids from qualified firms for the Construction of Commonwealth Drive Waterline Installation Project in Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

The project consists of installation of new distribution line along Commonwealth Drive; connecting the new waterline to existing water mains; and installation of a new pressure reducing valve. The work is also inclusive of installation of new service laterals and water meters with individual pressure reducing valves, and relocation or reconnection of existing service laterals to new distribution line also with individual pressure reducing valve. The work shall be done in accordance with the Project Plans and Specifications and without disruption to the daily operation of the water system. CUC requires the Project to be completed in 270 calendar days from date of award of contract.

The project is funded by a grant from the United States of Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). The award of this project is contingent upon receipt of approval for project award from USEPA.

Prospective Bidders must pre-register with the CUC Procurement & Supply Division. The Bid Package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement and Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays, upon completion of registration and presentation of a receipt evidencing a non-refundable payment to the CUC Treasury Section, by cash, check or credit card in the amount of $200.00 (non-refundable) for one IFB package set.

A Pre-Bid Conference followed by a Site Visit is scheduled on **January 23, 2024 at 10:00 AM (ChST)** at the CUC Main Conference Room, 3rd Floor, Room No.17, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building.

One (1) original and Five (5) hard copies must be submitted in a sealed envelope marked **"CUC-IFB-24-004, Commonwealth Drive Waterline Installation Phase I Project"**, to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, **no later than 10:00 AM (ChST) on February 14, 2024**, at which time they will be publicly opened and read aloud. Late submissions and conditional bids will not be considered. Bid shall be submitted on the provided Bid Forms. Bidders are required to complete all Bid Forms. Bidders may supplement the form as appropriate. Bids will be required to be submitted under a condition of irrevocability for a period of 60 days after submission. **Late submissions and conditional bids will not be considered.**

A Bid Guarantee of *fifteen percent (15%)* of the total bid price must accompany the bids. The bid guarantee may be in cash, certified check, cashier's check, or bid bond executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety.

A *Payment Bond* of one hundred (100%) percent and a *Performance Bond* of one hundred (100%) percent of the total bid price will be required upon the execution of the contract by the successful bidders. The Payment and Performance bond must be executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury. Surety Company must be authorized to do business in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

All insurers' questions, concerns and qualification shall be handled by the Department of Commerce Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC). The OIC is tasked with regulating and monitoring compliance to the CNMI's Insurance Code (Title 4, Division 7). *Bidders are required to submit clearance from the OIC certifying their insurer of choice is in compliance with the CNMI's Insurance Code.*

All bidders are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the bidders due to lack of information or understanding of the bid requirements in the course of Contractor's preparation of a bid under the contract. Bidders are required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws. This bid and the ensuing contract shall be executed pursuant to the CUC Procurement Regulations.

This Invitation for Bids does not commit CUC to the award of a contract or contracts, nor to pay any cost incurred in the preparation and submission of bids in anticipation of a contract.

Questions or requests for clarification will be entertained only from pre-registered bidders and must be submitted in writing no later than **10:00 AM (ChST) on January 26, 2024**, to Mr. Manny B. Sablan, CUC Purchasing Administrator, via email at *manny.sablan@cucgov.org* with a copy to Mr. Aristotle Anicete, Project Engineer – via email at *aristotle.anicete@cucgov.org* and Ms. Christie L. Sablan, Procurement & Supply, Senior Administrative Technician – via email at *christie.sablan@cucgov.org*

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all bids for any reason and waive any defects in said bid proposal, if in its sole opinion, to do so would be in the best interest of CUC. All bids shall become the property of CUC.

BETTINA G. TERLAJE
Acting Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN
Purchasing Administrator

COMMONWEALTH ZONING BOARD SPECIAL MEETING

February 08, 2024 | 2:00 PM
Pedro P. Tenorio Multi-Purpose Center
Susupe, Saipan
Tel: 670-234-9661/2 • Fax: 670-234-9666

AGENDA

A. **Preliminary Matters**
1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call
3. Adoption of Agenda
4. Adoption of Minutes
   i. Regular Board Meeting – December 28, 2023
   ii. Continuation of 12/28/23 meeting – January 04, 2024
5. Communications
6. Public Comments

B. **Public Hearings**
1. None

C. **Report from Zoning Administrator**
1. Operations (Permitting & Enforcement)
2. Parking requirements: Garapan Core, Garapan East, and Beach Road zoning districts
3. Updates:
   i. Zoning's Clean-Healthy-Attractive-Safe Campaign
   ii. Nuisance Abatement and Blighted Properties Maintenance Act of 2018 Regulations
   iii. Publication of the Saipan Zoning Law

D. **Report from Legal Counsel**

E. **Executive Session**

F. **Adjournment**

/s/Henry Hofschneider, Chairman

DIVISION OF PROCUREMENT SERVICES
CNMI GOVERNMENT

INVITATION TO BID
ITB NO.: ITB24-GOV/CIP-42400032

SUBMISSION DATE: MARCH 1, 2024 TIME: 09:00 A.M.

"LEASE OF ONE (1) CLASS 'I' VEHICLE"

COPIES OF THE SPECIFICATIONS MAY BE OBTAINED ON THE MUNIS VENDOR SELF SERVICE PORTAL (https://selfservice.dof.gov-.mp/vss/) OR AT THE OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF PROCUREMENT SERVICES, LOCATED AT BLDG NO. 12552, ANATAHAN DRIVE, CAPTIOL HILL, SAIPAN, DURING REGULAR WORKING HOURS.

QUESTIONS REGARDING THIS ITB CAN BE MADE TO THE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM BY FEBRUARY 22, 2024, TO MS. KEONA DLG. TORRES VIA EMAIL AT ktorres.cip@gmail.com

THE PROVISIONS OF THE CNMI PROCUREMENT REGULATIONS, NMIAC SECTION 70-30.3-725 AND 70-30.3-730 PROHIBITING GRATUITIES, KICKBACKS AND CONTINGENT FEES SHALL APPLY.

THE CNMI GOVERNMENT RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REJECT ANY OR ALL BIDS, OR PORTIONS THEREOF, AND WAIVE IMMATERIAL DEFECTS IF TO DO SO WOULD BE IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CNMI GOVERNMENT.

/S/ ELIZABETH BALAJADIA
ADMINISTRATOR, CIP

/S/ BRIEN SERS NICHOLAS JR.
Acting Director, PS

Opinion

Hafa Adai!
Saipan Tribune
THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER
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MEMBER

The Associated Press | Pacific Islands News Association

EDITORIAL

Cheats and scammers still raking in pandemic funds

The federal government ramped up the printing presses during the pandemic, throwing cash around like the proverbial drunken sailor. While much of that aid helped businesses and individuals navigate unprecedented shutdowns, a significant portion of the money went up in smoke.

An Associated Press analysis last year concluded that at least $123 billion in COVID relief was "wasted or misspent" while "fraudsters potentially stole more than $280 billion." No doubt the numbers are higher today.

Federal prosecutors have brought scores of actions against the crooks. In August, the Justice Department said it had filed charges against defendants "for offenses related to (more than) $836 million in alleged COVID-19 fraud." Yet Congress now sits idly by as criminals loot programs passed as pandemic relief even though the crisis has long since passed.

One of the COVID-era measures federal lawmakers created is the Employee Retention Credit, intended to provide tax breaks to companies that continued to pay their employees during the pandemic. The measure was projected to cost $55 billion, but has so far cost four times that amount (and rising), according to The Wall Street Journal. Another estimate puts the total cost at $550 billion. In addition, the IRS is investigating fraudulent claims in the billions of dollars.

The Employee Retention Credit was catnip to con artists. Bogus firms sprung up offering to help businesses claim the credit for a percentage of the take (you may have heard them in TV or radio ads). The IRS issued warnings to business filers, urging them to use only reliable tax professionals rather than "a promoter or marketer hustling to get a hefty contingency fee."

The problem is that the law allows businesses to file for relief as many as four years after the fact, all the way through tax year 2025. As of December, the IRS had more than 1 million back claims pending. The agency has noticed a trend. "The further we get from the pandemic," IRS Commissioner Danny Werfel told Forbes, "we believe the percentage of legitimate claims coming in is declining."

That should be an opening for Congress to tighten rules for back claims. "This approach would invalidate many of the claims made at the behest of the cottage industry of ERC fraudsters," Andrew Moylan, a public finance expert, wrote in a recent Journal commentary, "while preserving those made earlier by truly needy companies."

The pandemic is over. Why are temporary measures intended to blunt the economic destruction wrought by COVID still draining taxpayers and lining the pockets of cheats and scammers?

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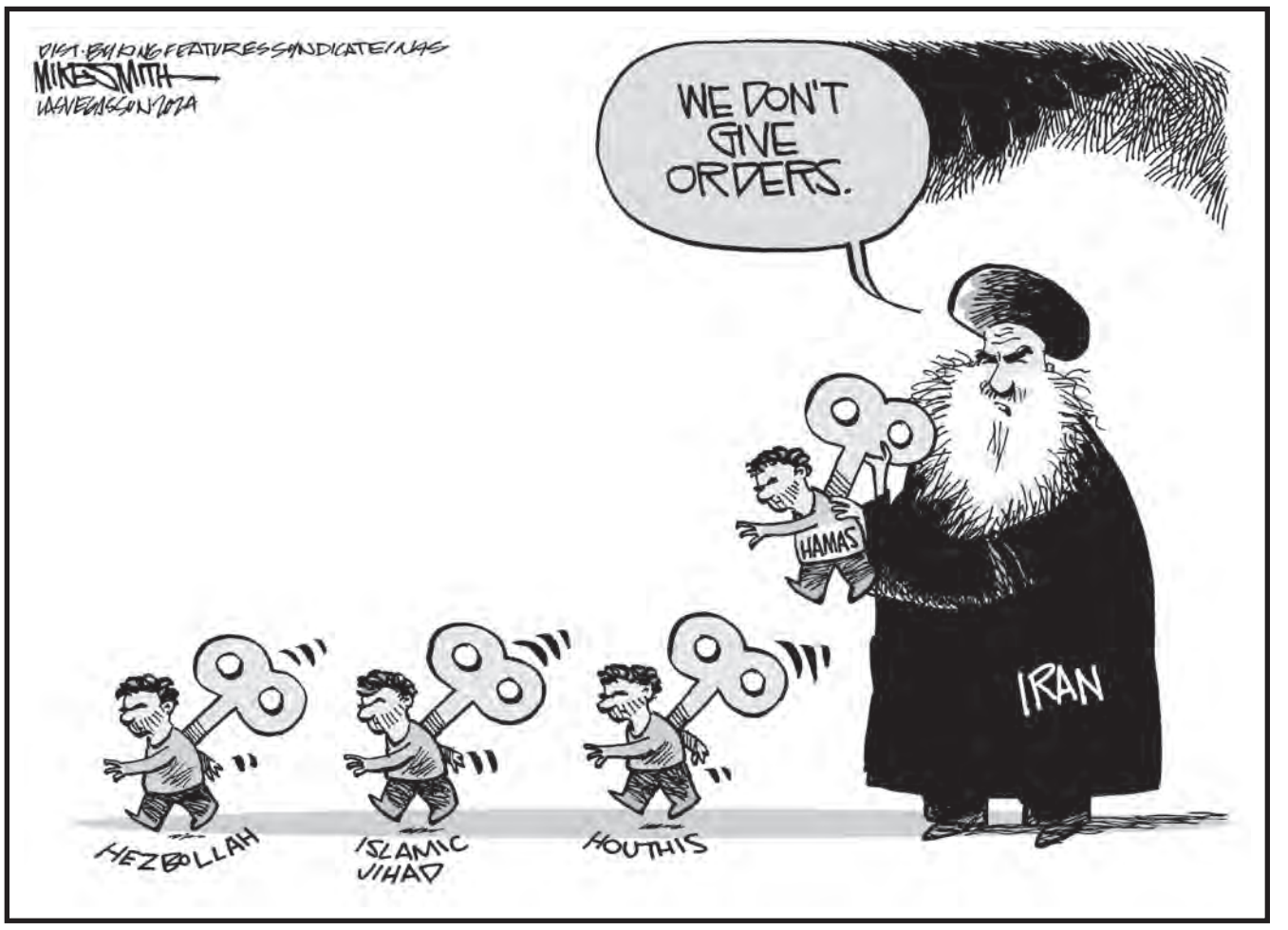


A road rage horror story, a child's murder and lessons for us all

By ROBIN ABCARIAN
Los Angeles Times

The killing of 6-year-old Aiden Leos on an Orange County freeway is a haunting and cautionary tale. The series of events that led to the death of the little boy presents an object lesson in why drivers should never, ever overreact when they perceive they are being disrespected on the road. Make this your mantra, folks: Just let it go. Just let it go.

On May 21, 2021, Aiden's mom, Joanna Cloonan, left their Costa Mesa home to take her son to school at Calvary Chapel Pre-School in Yorba Linda. They were driving north on the 55 Freeway in their Chevy Sonic, Aiden strapped into his car seat in back.

What happened next that morning was stupid, unnecessary and shameful, and a horrific reminder that getting into tiffs while driving can have tragic, ruinous consequences.

According to the Orange County Register, a Volkswagen Golf driven by Wynne Lee sped up behind Cloonan in the carpool lane, sped around her, then moved back into the lane in front of Cloonan's car, cutting Cloonan off and brake-checking her. "Lee then flashed a peace sign that the mother took as less than genuine," the report said.

Instead of letting it go, Cloonan angrily pulled up next to the VW and flipped the couple off. Big mistake.

Lee's passenger, Marcus Eriz, reached into the back seat for his gun.

"She remembered Eriz smiling at her from the passenger seat," wrote my colleague Christopher Goffard, "then hearing a loud sound as she pulled away. It was a single bullet from Eriz's gun, passing through the trunk and through her son's body."

The bullet hit Aiden from the back, ripping through his liver and lung, before piercing his heart and exiting his body. He bled to death on the freeway shoulder while his mother cried hysterically and a CHP officer tried to save him.

On Thursday, Eriz, 26, was rightfully convicted of second-degree murder and shooting into an occupied vehicle. The jury took only two hours to decide. He faces up to 40 years in prison and is to be sentenced April 12.

Lee, his girlfriend, will be tried later on lesser charges.

The almost unspeakable irony at the heart of this case is what Eriz told investigators about why he was carrying a gun in the first place: "People have been acting crazy around the freeway."

A self-fulfilling prophecy if ever there was one.

Last March, the nonprofit group Everytown for Gun Safety reported that road rage "shooting deaths and injuries continue to pile up" even though the spike in gun violence that occurred during the height of the COVID pandemic had subsided. The group's research and policy arm analyzed gun violence data and determined that the number of road rage injuries and violent incidents involving guns has increased every year since 2018. "These incidents translate to a person being shot and either injured or killed in a road rage incident in 2022 every 16 hours." Generally speaking, states with the most lax gun laws have the highest rate of gun-related road rage incidents.

In May, a young man described by his friends as a music-loving surfer from Jordan was killed in Marina del Rey after getting out of his car at a stoplight to talk to a driver who had cut off the vehicle he was riding in with a friend. The driver blew a hole in his chest and, according to the Los Angeles Police Department, there has been no arrest.

In December, 4-year-old Gor Adamyan was killed in Lancaster after his parents, on the way to the grocery store, accidentally cut off a car whose driver then began following the family and harassed them before shooting at the car. Gor died in what has been described as a "hail of bullets." The suspected gunman, Byron Burkhart, 29, has been charged with murder, attempted murder and shooting into an occupied car. If convicted, he faces life in prison.

Anyone who has ever gotten behind the wheel in city or freeway traffic has experienced road rage at some point—theirs or someone else's.

"It could happen to any one of us," said Orange County prosecutor Todd Spitzer, as he commented on Eriz's conviction. "We all drive the freeways of Southern California. We've all gotten upset at other motorists; other motorists have gotten upset at us. I've thrown some gestures around myself."

If I am being honest, so have I. I do some of my best swearing behind the wheel. I may occasionally drive aggressively—say, gunning it to get ahead of a driver who decides to speed up instead of let me in when I am changing lanes. I also have what are undoubtedly imaginary power struggles with other drivers all the time, which make me ashamed of myself. I sometimes catch myself wondering how younger, less mature and/or testosterone-fueled drivers restrain themselves when I, an older, presumably calmer driver, can get so teed off behind the wheel.

But I don't drive to punish. I have never braked in front of someone to teach them a lesson. I've never rolled down my window to yell at anyone. I would never take the chance, because, as Eriz put it,

See ROAD on Page 9

EDITORIAL POLICY Letters to the editor must include the NAME, VILLAGE ADDRESS, and CONTACT NUMBER of the contributor. Letters that do not have these information will immediately be trashed. Contributions consisting of 500 words or less have more chances of getting published. The *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to publish a contribution or not; the right to edit submissions for length, accuracy, and clarity; and the right to publish and distribute contributions in print, electronic, or other media formats. Submissions may be sent via snail mail to the 2nd Floor, JP Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, 96950; fax (670) 235-3740; e-mail to editor@saipantribune.com; or through our website at www.saipantribune.com.

Tinian Hot Pepper Festival: 20 years of *pika*

MAKING TOURISM OUR BUSINESS
By CHRISTOPHER A. CONCEPCION
Special to the Saipan Tribune

Christopher A. Concepcion is managing director of the Marianas Visitors Authority.

On Feb. 16-17, 2024, the 20th Annual Tinian Hot Pepper Festival will take place in the Marianas highlighting Tinian's famous "donne sali," the island's diminutive but famously potent hot pepper.

The Tinian Hot Pepper Festival is one of a handful of annual signature events conceptualized by the then board and management of the Marianas Visitors Authority to attract visitors and media attention to the Marianas. As with the new Rota Marathon inaugurated a couple weeks ago, Pika Festival is traditionally held on a federal holiday day weekend—Presidents Day weekend, in this case—to make it more convenient for visitors. The festival—affectionately called Pika Fest by locals—is organized in close cooperation with the Tinian Mayor's Office, who provide a tremendous amount of manpower and in-kind support. "Pika," of course, means "spicy hot." "Pika" can also mean "excellent." And if it's extraordinarily hot or excellent, you would say "pikakaka!"

It's been more than a decade since the MVA began to place more emphasis on the Marianas as a multi-island destination. While most people in our source market countries are still more familiar with the name of "Saipan," as a result of our marketing efforts of Tinian and Rota—their unique charms, historical and scenic sites, and special events like the Tinian Hot Pepper Festival—there is growing awareness and interest in what each of these islands has to offer. In fact, in the MVA's recent media blitz in Korea, we invited people to vote online for their favorite island, and nearly one-fourth of voters chose "Energetic Tinian" (another quarter of voters preferred "Romantic Rota"). It's well known that some visitors simply prefer Tinian or Rota over Saipan once they experience these islands, returning time and time again to visit and even building ties with local families. This emotional connection is what many of today's travelers are looking for—something meaningful beyond sand, surf, and sun—and the hospitality and close-knit community of Tinian offers this 365 days a year.

In addition to the charm of the people, the MVA has recently turned its attention to opening historic trails to immerse visitors further in Tinian's lush nature where they can also encounter buildings, structures, and artifacts from decades, centuries, and even millennia past. As funding allows and with the further military development of northern Tinian, we will continue look for and develop new sites to add to Tinian's current highlights, which include the giant limestone latte stones of House of Taga and the World War II era North Field complex—both sites on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places.

The MVA is also always looking for ways to improve our annual signature events, and this year's Tinian Hot Pepper Festival is no exception. We will hold the first ever Pika Run—featuring a 5K course this year—at 6am on Feb. 17. Registration is only $10, and cash prizes will be awarded in Men's and Women's Divisions. Registration can be made on race day from 5am-5:30am at the start line at the Fiesta Grounds.

We're also leveling up our classic "donne sali" eating competition—officially the Triple J Hot Pepper Eating Contest this year. We're pitting the genders against each other in two separate showdowns on both days, again with cash prizes. May the bravest and toughest prevail! Or if you like a bit of beef with your "donne sali" check out the JC Café Burger Eating Contest. A cha-cha contest, beach volleyball contest, Mr. & Miss Pika contest for children, and Estafao Pika (spicy chicken stew) Cooking Contest are all in the works, with registration details to be announced shortly. And helping to make all the fun possible this year is our Exclusive Pika Sponsor DOCOMO Pacific.

From what we've heard, most hotel accommodations are sold out—great news, really—but there are some excellent camping accommodations with bathrooms and showers right next to the festival grounds. Why not hop on the plane or book a ride on our boat ferry and make it a weekend with us? You can find more festival details at www.mymarianascom or @ visitTheMarianas on Facebook.

As I mentioned last month when writing about the Rota Marathon, convenient and affordable interisland air service is the single most important factor to the further development of interisland tourism. A longer length of stay for our average visitor would also help, as most now spend their short three-day visit only one island. But we know there is market demand for Tinian.

For sure, Pika Fest is one of the best weekends of the year to visit Tinian, along with the annual fiesta of the patron saint, San Jose. But let me extend an invitation to consider travelling to Tinian on any of the other 50 weeks in the year. For the culturally curious, consider the Chief Taga Festival. For World War II history buffs, any of several memorial events held during the year, often attended by both American and/or Japanese veterans or their family members. For gourmets, the up-and-coming Beef, Beer, & Bands Festival. Or escape on any quiet weekend for some rest, relaxation, and rejuvenation on the quiet beaches and roadways of this picturesque and tranquil destination. Discover for yourself why Tinian is just "pikakaka!"

US retaliation for American deaths in Jordan shouldn't be driven by war fever

By DANIEL DEPETRIS
Chicago Tribune

Daniel DePetris is a fellow at Defense Priorities and a foreign affairs columnist for the Chicago Tribune.

Until this weekend, the roughly 45,000 U.S. troops based in the Middle East were able to insulate themselves from the chaos of the region. Granted, American service members in Iraq and Syria have been attacked more than 150 times by Iran-backed militias since October, but none of those attacks resulted in fatalities thanks to a combination of luck and antimissile defenses.

That all changed Sunday, when President Joe Biden broke the news that a drone attack on living quarters had killed three Americans and wounded more than 30. The attack occurred in northeastern Jordan, a stone's throw from the Syrian border, at a facility known as Tower 22, which has been used by U.S. forces for years to support U.S. operations in Syria.

The Pentagon is clear that an Iran-supported militia perpetrated the attack. War fever is gripping Washington, with longtime Iran hawks using last weekend's tragedy as an opportunity to amplify their case for why the U.S. needs to hit Tehran directly. Lawmakers such as U.S. Sens. Lindsey Graham, Tom Cotton and John Cornyn have jumped on social media to recommend bombing Iran directly, despite the fact that the U.S. intelligence community still doesn't have a full picture of what exactly occurred and that Iran doesn't have direct command and control over its proxies.

Even so, there is no doubt Biden will respond militarily. He was willing to retaliate after militia attacks that injured U.S. forces, and it's a guarantee he will strike back now that Americans have been killed. The U.S. bombed Kataib Hezbollah, one of these militias, just last week, destroying facilities in western Iraq and south of Baghdad. The Iraqi government has been increasingly vocal about these U.S. precision strikes, lambasting them as a violation of Iraqi sovereignty that is chipping away at the U.S.-Iraq relationship. The president intimated his response a few hours after releasing his statement about the attack. "We had a tough day last night in the Middle East. We lost three brave souls in an attack on one of our bases," Biden said during a stop in South Carolina. "And we shall respond."

The debate inside the White House revolves around the scope and intensity of that response. It wouldn't be wrong to assume that U.S. retaliation would be far broader than it was during last week's U.S. strikes in Iraq, if only because of the loss of American lives. Yet the extent of that response matters, for as much as Biden may have the legitimate urge to avenge the deaths of Americans, he also needs to be cognizant about the risk of escalation. Preventing more escalation in the Middle East is purportedly a U.S. policy goal, so any U.S. military action that would undermine it would be self-defeating.

There is blood in the water right now. Emotions are raw — and after listening to some of the cavalier statements coming from Capitol Hill, we might assume that the U.S. is on the cusp of launching a war of choice against Iran. But responsible policymakers can't afford to let hysteria rule the day. Emotion, whether it be fear, pride or anger, is a terrible basis for good policy.

So what should the U.S. do, exactly?

In this specific instance, there is no use debating whether the U.S. should use military power. Judging by Biden's words and those of his advisers, the decision has already been made. And military retaliation is perfectly justifiable: U.S. adversaries must understand that they can't shoot at U.S. troops and not be held accountable for it.

The U.S. strikes, however, must be proportionate. Militia arms depots, storage facilities and training grounds are all fair game. But striking inside Iranian territory as so many knee-jerk armchair generals are clamoring for isn't smart if your overall objective in the region is to stop the violence from spreading further. Iran, of course, can't compete with the U.S. in a full-fledged war; its conventional military power is pathetic even by regional standards. Yet Tehran does possess the largest missile arsenal in the region, with a range to strike U.S. bases in the Persian Gulf, Jordan, Iraq and Syria. To believe the Iranians would simply roll over and take it on the chin after a U.S. attack would be naive at best and delusional at worst. The U.S. killed one of Iran's top generals in January 2020, and Tehran responded days later by sending more than a dozen ballistic missiles into a U.S. base in Iraq.

Notably, any U.S. military action should be accompanied with back channel diplomacy. By "diplomacy," I don't necessarily mean negotiations but stern communication. The Biden administration must make it crystal clear to the Iranians that while the U.S. will never hesitate to defend its people, it has no intention of starting a wider war and in fact would have preferred not to engage in military action at all were it not for their proxies' behavior.

A message should be sent to the Iraqi government as well: Start controlling the militias that are technically under your army's purview or prepare yourself for a U.S. aid cutoff and the withdrawal of the remaining 2,500 U.S. forces remaining in the country, although the U.S. should withdraw anyway.

Finally, the U.S. ought to come to grips with the fact that our presence in Iraq and Syria is doing more harm than good.

War should be a last resort. It's imperative we follow that golden rule.

ROAD

From page 8

people act crazy around the freeway.

AAA, the membership organization for people who drive, offers tips for avoiding road rage trouble: Do not make eye contact with angry drivers; don't make hand gestures; don't respond to aggression with aggression; and stay in your car if you are physically confronted.

By far their best piece of advice is this: "Be tolerant and forgiving. Assume that it's not personal. The other driver may just be having a really bad day."

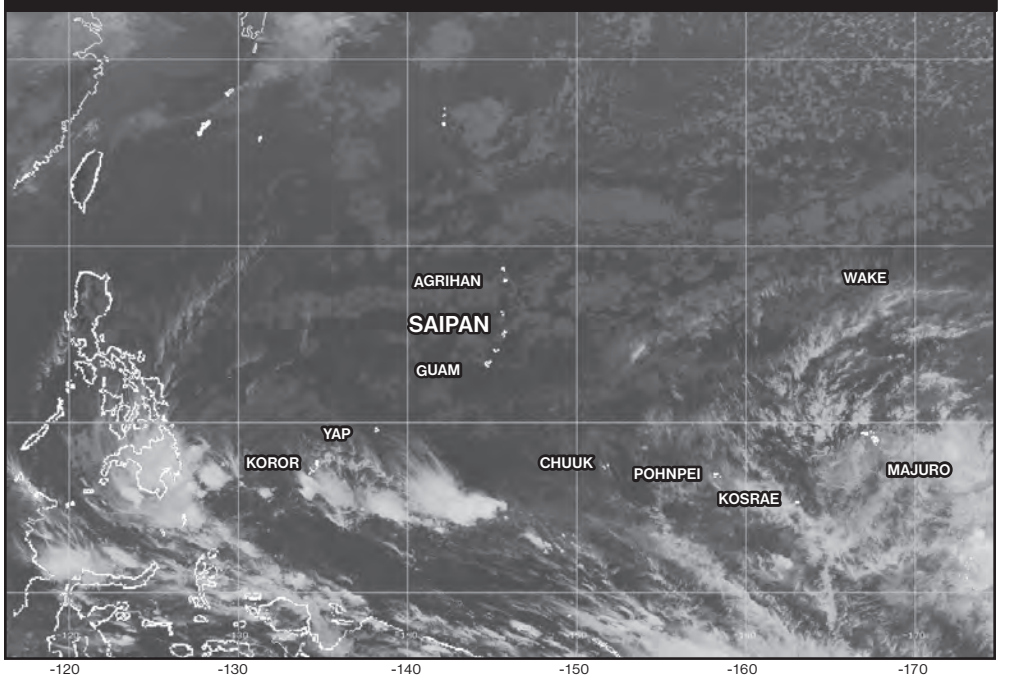
Or, I would add, may just be carrying a gun.

The Weather

5-DAY FORECAST FOR SAIPAN AND TINIAN

TODAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY
Partly cloudy with isolated light showers. Northeast to east winds 15 to 20 mph.	Breezy. Partly cloudy with isolated light showers. Northeast winds 20 to 25 mph.	Breezy. Partly cloudy with a 10 percent chance of light showers.	Partly cloudy. A 10 percent chance of light showers.	Breezy. Partly cloudy with a 10 percent chance of light showers.
84 74°	84 74°	84 74°	84 74°	84 74°

YESTERDAY'S SATELLITE IMAGE



PICTURE TIME: 8:06 AM WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 31, 2024

Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

Satellite shows open cell stratocumulus moving through the Marianas Waters, indicating cooler and drier mid latitude air. The buoys reveal combined seas of 7 to 10 feet composed of a northeast swell and a north-northeast swell, with northeast wind waves mixed in.

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam homepage: https://www.weather.gov/gum/

MICRONESIA		▲ ▼ °F
Guam and Rota	Partly Cloudy	84° / 74°
Palau	Mostly Cloudy	83° / 78°
Yap	Partly Cloudy	83° / 78°
Chuuk	Partly Cloudy	86° / 80°
Pohnpei	Partly Cloudy	85° / 79°
Kosrae	Mostly Cloudy	85° / 79°
Majuro	Mostly Cloudy	85° / 80°

DAY	SUNRISE	SUNSET
Today	6:46 AM	6:14 PM
Friday	6:46 AM	6:15 PM
Saturday	6:45 AM	6:15 PM
Sunday	6:45 AM	6:16 PM
Monday	6:45 AM	6:16 PM

DAY	MOONRISE	MOONSET	MOONRISE
Today	-	10:38 AM	11:21 PM
Friday	-	11:13 AM	5:18 AM
Saturday	-	12:10 AM	11:51 AM
Sunday	-	1:02 AM	12:34 PM
Monday	-	1:59 AM	1:23 PM

AROUND THE GLOBE		▲ ▼ °F
Auckland	Partly Cloudy	77° / 66°
Beijing	Fair	32° / 22°
Hong Kong	Partly Cloudy	67° / 62°
Honolulu	Cloudy	76° / 71°
London	Cloudy	51° / 45°
Los Angeles	Sunny	70° / 49°
Manila	Mostly Cloudy	88° / 75°
Melbourne	Partly Cloudy	75° / 55°
Miami	Partly Cloudy	77° / 65°
New York	Cloudy	38° / 32°
Osaka	Showers	55° / 44°
Paris	Mostly Cloudy	52° / 45°
Busan	Cloudy	53° / 43°
Rome	Cloudy	61° / 52°
Salem	Mostly Sunny	70° / 49°
San Francisco	Mostly Sunny	38° / 17°
Seoul	Sunny	48° / 26°
Tokyo	Sunny	54° / 39°
Washington, DC	Cloudy	43° / 39°

TIDES: SAIPAN HARBOR TODAY		FEET
5:19 AM	Low Tide	0.41
11:45 AM	High Tide	1.60
6:35 PM	Low Tide	0.47
-	-	-

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FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 1, 2024

DEPARTURES

SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)

UA076	9:50AM	10:35AM	Daily

SAIPAN- NARITA (NRT)

UA824	7:05AM	9:45AM	1, 3, 5

GUAM-MANILA (MNL)

PR 111	5:55AM	7:55AM	Daily
UA193	7:50PM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Palau
UA183	7:55PM	9:50PM	Daily

SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)

OZ626/703	3:10AM	10:30PM	4, 7 via ICN
7C3403/2305	4:40AM	10:20PM	Daily
UA076/183	9:50AM	9:50PM	Daily via Guam
UA076/193	9:50AM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Guam, Palau

SAIPAN-INCHEON (ICN)

TW308	2:15AM	6:10AM	Daily
OZ626	3:10AM	6:55AM	4,7
7C3403	4:40AM	8:35AM	Daily
7C3405	4:35PM	8:25PM	Daily

ARRIVALS

GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN

UA174	8:00AM	8:45AM	Daily

NARITA (NRT)-SAIPAN

UA825	9:25PM	2:00AM+1	2, 4, 7

MANILA (MNL)-GUAM

UA189	00:40AM	6:30AM	3, 6
PR110	10:05PM	3:55AM+1	Daily
UA192	10:40PM	6:30AM+1	2, 5 via Palau
UA184	10:55PM	4:45AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7

MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN

UA189/174	00:40AM	8:45AM+1	3, 6 via Guam
OZ702/625	12:05PM	1:40AM+1	3, 6 via ICN
UA192/174	10:40PM	8:45AM+1	2, 5 via Palau, Guam
UA184/174	10:55PM	8:45AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6,7 via Guam
7C2306/3406	11:15PM	3:30PM+1	Daily

INCHEON (ICN)-SAIPAN

7C3406	10:10AM	3:30PM	Daily
TW307	7:45PM	1:15AM+1	Daily
7C3404	10:15PM	3:35AM+1	Daily
OZ625	8:20PM	1:40AM+1	3, 6

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); UA United Airlines; PR, Philippine Airlines; TW, T'Way Air; OZ, Asiana Airlines; 7C, Jeju Air; BX, Air Busan • ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. *(The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)*

STAR MARIANAS AIR, INC.

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 2, 2024

SAIPAN TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1301	SAIPAN	ROTA	08:30	09:00	Daily
1302	SAIPAN	ROTA	10:30	11:00	Daily
1303	SAIPAN	ROTA	15:30	16:00	Daily

ROTA TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3101	ROTA	SAIPAN	9:30	10:00	Daily
3102	ROTA	SAIPAN	11:30	12:00	Saturday & Sunday
3103	ROTA	SAIPAN	13:30	14:00	Monday To Friday
3104	ROTA	SAIPAN	16:30	17:00	Daily

ROTA TO GUAM

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3401	ROTA	GUAM	11:30	12:00	Monday To Friday

GUAM TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
4301	GUAM	ROTA	12:30	13:00	Monday To Friday

SAIPAN TO TINIAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1201	SAIPAN	TINIAN	7:30	7:45	Daily
1202	SAIPAN	TINIAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
1203	SAIPAN	TINIAN	9:00	9:15	Daily
1204	SAIPAN	TINIAN	10:00	10:15	Daily
1206	SAIPAN	TINIAN	14:00	14:15	Daily
1207	SAIPAN	TINIAN	15:00	15:15	Daily
1208	SAIPAN	TINIAN	16:00	16:15	Daily
1209	SAIPAN	TINIAN	17:00	17:15	Daily

TINIAN TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
2101	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
2102	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:30	8:45	Daily
2103	TINIAN	SAIPAN	9:30	9:45	Daily
2104	TINIAN	SAIPAN	10:30	10:45	Daily
2106	TINIAN	SAIPAN	14:30	14:45	Daily
2107	TINIAN	SAIPAN	15:30	15:45	Daily
2108	TINIAN	SAIPAN	16:30	16:45	Daily
2109	TINIAN	SAIPAN	17:30	17:45	Daily

Business

Chamber awards NMC, ASCNMI, Caravan of Food

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

LEIGH GASES

The 2023 Non-Profit of the Year winner, Autism Society of the CNMI, poses with nominees at the 2023 Saipan Chamber of Commerce Annual Business Person of the Year Gala last Saturday night at the Kensington Hotel Saipan.

LEIGH GASES

The 2023 Sustainable Business of the Year is Caravan of Food, with its representative, center, during the 2023 Saipan Chamber of Commerce Annual Business Person of the Year Gala last Saturday night at the Kensington Hotel Saipan.

The Saipan Chamber of Commerce awarded the 2023 Chamber Member of the Year to the Northern Marianas College; Non-profit of the Year Award to the Autism Society of the CNMI; and their new award, the Sustainable Business Award to the Caravan of Food last Saturday at the Chamber's Annual Business Person of the Year Gala last Saturday night at the Kensington Hotel Saipan.

The Autism Society of the CNMI beat out four other nominees to win the award, much to the organization's shock. Clarise Arriola, president of the Autism Society of the CNMI, told *Saipan Tribune* that they are "humbled and honored" for being selected as the winner. The organization provides support, promote, and advocate for individuals with autism and their families.

"The Autism Society of the CNMI was shocked to have been nominated, let alone being selected as our organization consists of a small but committed group of volunteers. This recognition is a testament of our efforts to continue to spread autism awareness in our community," said Arriola.

Arriola said their journey has been a remarkable one, as they had just stepped up with their efforts last year with more events and exposure for their cause. She said the award "is an affirmation that our commitment to fostering understanding, acceptance, and inclusiveness for individuals on the autism spectrum has not gone unnoticed."

This journey has been a remarkable one, said Arriola, "especially since we stepped up our efforts just last year by providing more events and exposure for our cause.

"As a small group, this recognition is a powerful encouragement that motivates us to continue our mission with even greater enthusiasm. This award reflects the efforts of our members and our community's support in embracing our cause. We will continue this momentum to amplify our efforts, reach a broader audience, and make an even more significant impact on the lives of individuals and families affected by autism," said Arriola.

She then thanked the Chamber for acknowledging the impact of their work, and to those that have supported the organization.

As for the Chamber Member of the Year, the winner was NMC who has been a member for over 20 years.

Its president, Dr. Galvin Deleon Guerrero, said they've been a Chamber member for a long time because they "remain committed to partnering with business leaders to cultivate our workforce, develop our economy, and improve the lives of our people."

He said the award is a "reflection of and a testament to the diligence, skill, and commitment of our Proa Tribe in working closely with the business community to meet the workforce needs of our islands and help revive our economy and livelihoods."

On how he felt about NMC getting the award, he said, "I am just incredibly proud of everyone that helped make this possible, especially the hard-working employees and students of the college who have done so much with so little."

LEIGH GASES

The 2023 Chamber Member of the Year, Northern Marianas College, represented by its president, Dr. Galvin Deleon Guerrero, center with trophy, poses with nominees at the 2023 Saipan Chamber of Commerce Annual Business Person of the Year Gala last Saturday night at the Kensington Hotel Saipan.

In collaboration with the Mariana Islands Nature Alliance, the Chamber awarded Caravan of Food with the Sustainable Business Award. It bested one other business—Artman Trash Corp.

The Caravan of Food in Garapan offers authentic Palestinian cuisine, founded by the late Abed E. Younis. The restaurant implements sustainable practices in sourcing their ingredients, reducing plastic waste, and practicing energy conservation.

Meta, TikTok, other social media CEOs to testify before a Senate committee on child exploitation

Sexual predators. Addictive features. Self-harm and eating disorders. Unrealistic beauty standards. Bullying. These are just some of the issues young people are dealing with on social media—and children's advocates and lawmakers say companies are not doing enough to protect them.

On Wednesday, the CEOs of Meta, TikTok, X and other social media companies are testifying before the Senate Judiciary Committee about child exploitation on their platforms, as lawmakers, families and advocates are growing increasingly concerned about the effects of social media on young people's lives.

While Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg is a veteran of congressional hearings since his first one over the Cambridge Analytica privacy debacle in 2018, it will only be the second time for TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew and the first for Linda Yaccarino, the CEO of X. Snap CEO Evan Spiegel and Discord CEO Jason Citron are also scheduled to testify.

"We understand that they are companies and they have to make profit. But when you're faced with really important safety and privacy decisions, the revenue in the bottom line should not be the first factor that these companies are considering," said Zamaan Qureshi, co-chair of Design It For Us, a youth-led coalition advocating for safer social media. "These companies have had opportunities to do this before they failed to do that. So independent regulation needs to step in."

Meta will likely be a central focus of the hearing, as the Menlo Park, California-based tech giant has been sued by dozens of states that say it knowingly and deliberately designing features on Instagram and Facebook that addict children to its platforms and failed to protect them from online predators.

The company has been beefing up its child safety features in recent weeks, announcing earlier this month that it will start hiding inappropriate content from teenagers' accounts on Instagram and Facebook, including posts about suicide, self-harm and eating disorders. It also restricted minors' ability to receive messages from anyone they don't follow or aren't connected to on Instagram and on Messenger and added new "nudges" to try to discourage teens from browsing Instagram videos or messages late at night. The nudges encourage kids to close the app, though it does not force them to do so. ***(AP)***

Trump will meet with Teamsters in Washington as he tries to cut into Biden's union support

WASHINGTON (AP)—As he looks past the GOP primary and towards a likely general election rematch against President Joe Biden, Donald Trump will meet with members of the Teamsters Union in Washington Wednesday afternoon as he tries to cut into Biden's support.

The former president will participate in a roundtable with the group's executive board, its president and rank-and-file members as he targets the blue-collar workers who fueled his 2016 victory and who are expected to play a major role in November, particularly in critical Midwestern swing states like Wisconsin and Michigan.

Union voters tend to vote Democratic, with 56% of members and households backing Biden in 2020, according to AP VoteCast. And Biden has already received significant organized labor backing with early endorsements from the AFL-CIO and others. Trump is hoping to cut into that support as he casts himself as pro-worker and tries to exacerbate longstanding divisions between union leaders and rank-and-file members.

On Sunday, he called on members of the United Auto Workers to oust their president, Shawn Fain, after the group endorsed Biden.

"Shawn Fain doesn't understand this or have a clue," Trump wrote on his Truth Social network. "Get rid of this dope & vote for DJT. I will bring the Automobile Industry back to our Country."

Among the topics planned for discussion Wednesday are the shrinking middle class, workers' wages, antitrust and bankruptcy issues, as well as union rights.

"Our members want to hear from all candidates of all parties about what they plan to do for working people as President," Teamsters president Sean O'Brien said in a statement. "Our union wants every candidate to know that there are 1.3 million Teamsters nationwide whose votes will not be taken for granted. Workers' voices must be heard."

Biden has long billed himself as the most labor-friendly president in history, and went so far as to turn up on a picket line in the Detroit area during a strike last fall. He was also invited for his own session Wednesday. Biden campaign spokesperson Lauren Hitt said Biden "looks forward to meeting with the Teamsters and earning their endorsement," but the timing remained "TBA."

Earlier this month, O'Brien met privately with Trump at his Mar-a-Lago club, where the two discussed issues including right-to-work laws that allow those in unionized workplaces to opt out of paying dues and fees. They also posed for a side-by-side photo, both flashing thumbs-up signs, that Trump posted online.

Nation

House GOP takes party-line vote toward Mayorkas impeachment

» As border becomes 2024 campaign issue

AP

Chairman Mark Green, R-Tenn., right, confers with Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Texas, left, as Republicans on the Homeland Security Committee move to impeach Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas over the crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border, at the Capitol in Washington, Tuesday, Jan. 30, 2024.

WASHINGTON (AP)—House Republicans voted along party lines after midnight Wednesday to move toward impeaching Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas for a "willful and systematic" refusal to enforce immigration laws as border security becomes a top 2024 election issue.

The Homeland Security Committee debated all day Tuesday and well into the night before recommending two articles of impeachment against Mayorkas to the full House, a rare charge against a Cabinet official unseen in nearly 150 years, as Republicans make GOP presidential front-runner Donald Trump's hard-line deportation approach to immigration their own.

All committee Republicans voted in favor, while the Democrats unified against it.

"We cannot allow this man to remain in office any longer," said Chairman Mark Green, R-Tenn.

The impeachment articles charge that Mayorkas "refused to comply with Federal immigration laws" amid a record surge of migrants and that he has "breached the public trust" in his claims to Congress that the U.S.-Mexico border is secure.

The full House could vote on Mayorkas' impeachment as soon as next week. If approved, the charges would go to the Senate for a trial, though senators may first convene a special committee for consideration.

With an unusual personal appeal, Mayorkas—who is deep in Senate talks on a border security package—wrote in a letter to the committee that it should be working with the Biden administration to update the nation's "broken and outdated" immigration laws for the 21st century, an era of record global migration.

"We need a legislative solution and only Congress can provide it," Mayorkas wrote in the pointed letter to the panel's chairman.

Rarely has a Cabinet member faced impeachment's bar of "high crimes and misdemeanors," and Democrats on the panel dismissed the proceedings as a stunt and a sham that could set a chilling precedent for other civil servants snared in policy disputes by lawmakers who disagree with the president's approach.

"This is a terrible day for the committee, the United States, the Constitution and our great country," said Rep. Bennie Thompson of Mississippi, the committee's ranking Democrat.

Referring to Trump's "Make America Great Again" campaign slogan, Thompson said the "MAGA-led impeachment of Secretary Mayorkas is a baseless sham."

The House's proceedings against Mayorkas have created an oddly split-screen Capitol Hill, as the Senate works deliberately with the secretary on a bipartisan border security package that is now on life support.

The package being negotiated by the senators with Mayorkas could emerge as the most consequential bipartisan immigration proposal in a decade. Or it could collapse in political failure as Republicans, and some Democrats, run from the effort.

Trump, on the campaign trail and in private talks, has tried to squelch the deal. "I'd rather have no bill than a bad bill," Trump said over the weekend in Las Vegas.

President Joe Biden, in his own campaign remarks in South Carolina, said if Congress sends him a bill with emergency authority he'll "shut down the border right now" to get migration under control.

"I've done all I can do," Biden told reporters Tuesday before departing for a campaign-related trip to Florida. "Give me the power" through legislation, which he said is something he's asked "from the very day I got in office."

US hasn't seen syphilis numbers this high since 1950

NEW YORK (AP)—The U.S. syphilis epidemic isn't abating, with the rate of infectious cases rising 9% in 2022, according to a new federal government report on sexually transmitted diseases in adults.

But there's some unexpected good news: The rate of new gonorrhea cases fell for the first time in a decade.

It's not clear why infectious cases of syphilis rose 9% while gonorrhea dropped 9%, officials at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said, adding that it's too soon to know whether a new downward trend is emerging for the latter.

They are most focused on syphilis, which is less common than gonorrhea or chlamydia but considered more dangerous. And while it continues to have a disproportionate impact on gay and bisexual men, it is expanding in heterosexual men and women, and increasingly affecting newborns, too, CDC officials said.

Total cases surpassed 207,000 in 2022, a 17% increase and the highest count in the United States since 1950, according to data released Tuesday. The count includes not only the most infectious stages of the disease but also latent cases and cases in which pregnant women passed syphilis on to their babies.

Syphilis is a bacterial disease that can surface as painless genital sores but can ultimately lead to paralysis, hearing loss, dementia and even death if left untreated.

New syphilis infections plummeted in the U.S. starting in the 1940s when antibiotics became widely available and fell to their lowest by 1998.

About 59,000 of the 2022 cases involved the most infectious forms of syphilis. Of those, about a quarter were women and nearly a quarter were heterosexual men.

"I think it's unknowingly being spread in the cisgender heterosexual population because we really aren't testing for it. We really aren't looking for it" in that population, said Dr. Philip Chan, who teaches at Brown University and is chief medical officer of Open Door Health, a health center for gay, lesbian and transgender patients in Providence, Rhode Island.

The report also shows rates of the most infectious types of syphilis rose not just across the country but also across different racial and ethnic groups, with American Indian and Alaska Native people having the highest rate. South Dakota outpaced any other state for the highest rate of infectious syphilis at 84 cases per 100,000 people—more than twice as high as the state with the second-highest rate, New Mexico.

South Dakota's increase was driven by an outbreak in the Native American community, said Dr. Meghan O'Connell, chief public health officer at the Great Plains Tribal Leaders' Health Board based in Rapid City, South Dakota. Nearly all of the cases were in heterosexual people, and O'Connell said that STD testing and treatment was already limited in isolated tribal communities and only got worse during the pandemic.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services last year convened a syphilis task force focused on stopping the spread of the STD, with an emphasis on places with the highest syphilis rates—South Dakota, 12 other states and the District of Columbia.

The report also looked at the more common STDs of chlamydia and gonorrhea.

Chlamydia cases were relatively flat from 2021 to 2022, staying at a rate of about 495 per 100,000, though there were declines noted in men and especially women in their early 20s. For gonorrhea, the most pronounced decline was seen in women in their early 20s as well.

Experts say they're not sure why gonorrhea rates declined. It happened in about 40 states, so whatever explains the decrease appears to have occurred across most of the country. STD testing was disrupted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and officials believe that's the reason the chlamydia rate fell in 2020.

It's possible that testing and diagnoses were still shaking out in 2022, said Dr. Jonathan Mermin, director of the CDC's National Center for HIV, Viral Hepatitis, STD and TB Prevention.

"We are encouraged by the magnitude of the decline," Mermin said, though the gonorrhea rate is still higher now than it was pre-pandemic. "We need to examine what happened, and whether it's going to continue to happen."

Biden calls Trump a 'loser' as he raises money on ex-prexy's home turf in Florida

JUPITER, Fla. (AP)—Donald Trump's private jet, emblazoned with his last name in bold white letters, was parked nearby when Air Force One landed in Florida, where President Joe Biden labeled his predecessor and potential opponent in this year's campaign as a "loser" while raising money Tuesday for his reelection.

It was a typical jab from Biden, but it came with extra punch on Trump's home turf. The first fundraiser of the day was held at the Pelican Club in Jupiter, a wealthy enclave less than an hour from Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort.

"You're the reason Donald Trump's the defeated president," Biden told donors. "And you're the reason we're going to make him a loser again."

Biden said Republicans were determined to undo his administration's progress, such as limiting the cost of insulin and other prescription drugs, and he accused Trump of "threatening our very democracy."

The Democratic president has been buoyed by positive economic news as fears of a recession have faded. Now he's eager to stockpile campaign cash to help him promote his record and target Trump, the Republican presidential front-runner, in what is expected to be a grueling and expensive election year.

A second fundraiser was held in the Miami area in the evening, and it was hosted by Chris Korge, the national finance chairman for the Democratic National Committee. He said the event raised $6.2 million.

Biden warned the audience to "imagine the nightmare if Trump returned to office."

Although Florida's wealthy donors make the state an important stop for Biden, it's unlikely to swing his way in November. President Barack Obama won Florida in 2008 and 2012, but Trump carried the state in 2016 and 2020.

In addition, Republicans routed Democrats in Florida in the 2022 midterm elections, when they won campaigns for governor, U.S. Senate and other statewide positions by about 20 percentage points across the board. Voter registration, which favored Democrats by 600,000 a little more than a decade ago, now shows Republicans with an 800,000-voter margin.

Asia

N. Korea tested long-range cruise missiles to sharpen attack stance

SEOUL, South Korea (AP)—North Korea said Wednesday it conducted a test-firing of long-range cruise missiles with an aim to sharpen its counterattack and strategic strike capabilities, in its latest display of weapons threatening South Korea and Japan.

The report by North Korean state media came a day after South Korea's military detected the North firing multiple cruise missiles into waters off its western coast, the third launch of such weapons this month. The event extended a provocative streak in weapons testing as North Korea continues to raise pressure on the United States and its Asian allies amid a prolonged freeze in diplomacy.

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency said that the weapon tested on Tuesday was the Hwasal-2 and that the launch did not affect the security of neighbors. The report didn't specify the exact numbers of missiles fired or the specifics of their flight performance.

The North has previously described the Hwasal-2 as nuclear-capable and that their range is up to 2,000 kilometers (1,242 miles), a distance that would include U.S. military bases in Japan.

North Korea in recent years has been expanding its lineup of cruise missiles, which are designed to be fired from both land and naval assets. These weapons supplement the country's huge lineup of ballistic missiles, including short-range solid-fuel missiles aimed at overwhelming missile defenses in South Korea and intercontinental ballistic missiles designed to reach the U.S. mainland.

Since 2021, North Korea has conducted at least 11 rounds of tests of what it described as long-range cruise missiles fired from both land and sea.

The North's two previous tests of cruise missiles on Jan. 24 and Jan. 28 were of a new weapon called Pulhwasal-3-31, which is designed to be fired from submarines. Following that weapon's second launch on Sunday, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un reiterated his goal of building a nuclear-armed navy to counter what he described as growing external threats.

The North on Jan. 14 also tested a new solid-fuel intermediate-range missile, which underscored its efforts to advance its weapons that could target U.S. assets in the Pacific, including the military hub of Guam.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula are at their highest point in years, after Kim accelerated his weapons development to an unprecedented pace while issuing provocative nuclear threats against the United States, South Korea and Japan. The United States and its Asian allies in response have strengthened their combined military exercises and updated their deterrence strategies.

There are concerns that Kim, emboldened by the steady advancement of his nuclear arsenal and strengthened ties with Russia, would further ramp up pressure against his rivals in an election year in the United States and South Korea.

Experts say Kim's long-term goal is to force the United States to accept the idea of the North as a nuclear power and negotiate security concessions and sanctions relief from a position of strength.

PH, Vietnam agree to expand cooperation in South China Sea, which Beijing also claims

HANOI, Vietnam (AP)—The Philippines and Vietnam signed agreements Tuesday to prevent incidents in the South China Sea and broaden cooperation between their coast guards in a growing alliance that will likely be frowned upon by China, which claims virtually the entire waters.

The agreements, along with discussions on enhancing information-sharing and training exchanges between the Vietnamese and Philippine militaries, were forged during a visit to Hanoi by Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

Both sides agreed to boost trade and investment and signed a key deal on rice.

The Philippines and Vietnam have had especially tense confrontations with China in the strategic waterway and key route for global trade in recent years. Territorial faceoffs in the high seas between Chinese and Philippine ships intensified last year, fueling fears of a wider conflict that could involve Washington, Manila's longtime treaty ally.

Although Chinese and Philippine officials agreed earlier this month at a meeting in Shanghai to take steps to deescalate tensions, Marcos while in Hanoi raised his concerns over the long-seething disputes and cited increasingly aggressive actions by the Chinese coast guard.

"There continue to be … unilateral and illegal actions that violate our sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction and exacerbate tensions in the South China Sea," Marcos said in a call to Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh. Transcripts of his remarks were issued by the presidential office in Manila.

The Philippine president cited a water cannon assault by the Chinese coast guard that damaged a Philippine vessel on Dec. 10 near the Second Thomas Shoal and a similar incident in another disputed area, the Scarborough Shoal.

"We are firm in defending our sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction against any provocations," Marcos said. "But at the same time, we are also seeking to address these issues with China through peaceful dialogue and consultations as two equal sovereign states."

Marcos said that in his talk with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in the U.S. last November, he stressed "that need to deescalate tensions in the South China Sea, to which he agreed."

It was not immediately clear how the Vietnamese premier reacted to Marcos' remarks. Chinese officials also did not immediately comment on that, or on the agreements signed by the neighboring Southeast Asian countries.

Vietnamese and Philippine officials did not release specific details of their agreements on preventing and managing incidents in the South China Sea and intensifying coordination on maritime issues to promote trust and confidence.

"I hope that we can seriously implement this agreement as quickly as we can," Marcos said.

The accord on maritime cooperation "aims to establish a comprehensive partnership between our coast guards on capacity building, training and personnel and ship exchanges to enhance interoperability operations between our two countries," Marcos said.

The Philippine leader said his country was interested in a joint submission to a United Nations commission that deals with the limits of continental shelves of coastal states. "The Philippines is willing to work with Vietnam for a joint submission at the appropriate time," Marcos said.

World

Israeli forces dressed as civilian women, medics kill 3 militants

AP

In this image taken from surveillance video provided by the Palestinian Health Ministry, Israeli forces disguised as civilian women and medical workers hold weapons in a hallway at the Ibn Sina Hospital in the West Bank town of Jenin, Tuesday, jan 30, 2024, in the occupied West Bank, killing three Palestinian militants in a dramatic raid that underscored how deadly violence has spilled into the territory from the war in Gaza.

JENIN, West Bank (AP)—Israeli forces disguised as civilian women and medics stormed a hospital Tuesday in the occupied West Bank, killing three Palestinian militants in a dramatic raid that underscored how deadly violence has spilled into the territory from the war in Gaza.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, meanwhile, ruled out a military withdrawal from Gaza and the release of thousands of jailed militants—Hamas' main two demands for any cease-fire—casting doubt on the latest efforts to end a war that has destabilized the broader Middle East.

The Palestinian Health Ministry said Israeli forces opened fire inside the Ibn Sina Hospital in the West Bank town of Jenin. A hospital spokesperson said there was no exchange of fire, indicating it was a targeted killing.

Israel's military said the militants were using the hospital as a hideout, without providing evidence. It alleged that one of those targeted had transferred weapons and ammunition to others for a planned attack, purportedly inspired by Hamas' Oct. 7 assault on southern Israel that triggered the war in Gaza.

Security camera footage from the hospital shows about a dozen undercover forces, most of them armed, wearing Muslim headscarves, hospital scrubs or white doctor's coats. One carried a rifle in one arm and a folded wheelchair in the other.

Netanyahu, speaking at an event elsewhere in the West Bank, denied reports of a possible cease-fire deal to end the war in Gaza and repeated his vow to keep fighting until "absolute victory" over Hamas.

"We will not end this war without achieving all of our goals," said Netanyahu, who is under mounting pressure from families of the hostages and the wider public to reach a deal. "We will not withdraw the Israeli military from the Gaza Strip and we will not release thousands of terrorists," he said.

On Tuesday, Hamas' top political leader Ismail Haniyeh said the group was studying the latest terms for a deal, but that the priority was the "full withdrawal" of Israeli forces from Gaza and that any agreement should lead to a long-term cease-fire.

Enemy drone that killed US troops in Jordan mistaken for US drone

WASHINGTON (AP)—U.S. forces may have mistaken an enemy drone for an American one and let it pass unchallenged into a desert base in Jordan where it killed three U.S. troops and wounded dozens more, officials said Monday.

Details of the Sunday attack emerged as President Joe Biden faced a difficult balancing act, blaming Iran and looking to strike back in a forceful way without causing any further escalation of the Gaza conflict.

As the enemy drone was flying in at a low altitude, a U.S. drone was returning to the small installation known as Tower 22, according to a preliminary report cited by two officials, who were not authorized to comment and insisted on anonymity,

As a result, there was no effort to shoot down the enemy drone that hit the outpost. One of the trailers where troops sleep sustained the brunt of the strike, while surrounding trailers got limited damage from the blast and flying debris. While there are no large air defense systems at Tower 22, the base does have counter-drone systems, such as Coyote drone interceptors.

Aside from the soldiers killed, the Pentagon said more than 40 troops were wounded in the attack, most with cuts, bruises, brain injuries and similar wounds. Eight were medically evacuated, including three who were going to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany. The other five, who suffered "minor traumatic brain injuries," were expected to return to duty.

Asked if the failure to shoot down the enemy drone was "human error," Pentagon spokeswoman Sabrina Singh responded that the U.S. Central Command was still assessing the matter.

Environment

Global warming primary cause of record Amazon drought

EDMAR BARROS/AP

Residents of a riverside community carry food and containers of drinking water after receiving aid due to the ongoing drought in Careiro da Varzea, Amazonas state, Brazil, Oct. 24, 2023.

BRASILIA, Brazil (AP)—Human-induced global warming, and not El Niño, was the primary driver of last year's severe drought in the Amazon that sent rivers to record lows, required deliveries of food and drinking water to hundreds of river communities and killed dozens of endangered dolphins, researchers said Wednesday.

Both climate change and El Niño contributed about equally to a reduction in rainfall. But higher global temperatures were the biggest reason for the drought, according to World Weather Attribution, an initiative that brings together climate scientists to rapidly analyze extreme events and their possible connections to climate change.

The drought was agricultural, combining reduced rainfall with hotter conditions that evaporated moisture from plants and soil. It was that heat-driven evaporation that was critical in the drought's severity, said study co-author Friederike Otto, a climate scientist at the Imperial College of London.

"What is now about a one-in-50-year event would have been much less likely to occur in a 1.2-degree cooler world. If we continue to warm the climate, this combination of low rainfall and high temperatures will become even more frequent," Otto said at a news conference Wednesday.

The team uses a scientifically accepted method of running computer simulations of weather events as they would have unfolded in a fictional world without global warming, and comparing those results with what really happened.

The drought in the Amazon—the world's largest rainforest and crucial in storing away carbon dioxide that would otherwise contribute to warming—came as Earth endured the hottest year on record. The planet is closer than ever to the 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) increase since pre-industrial times that nations had hoped to stay within to avoid the worst consequences of climate change, such as deadly heat, rising seas, flooding and wildfires.

In Brazil's Tefé Lake, water temperatures soared to 39.1 degrees Celsius (102.4 Fahrenheit), likely causing the deaths of more than 150 pink and tucuxi river dolphins, two endangered species. Along the Amazon River, people saw their crops wither and fish disappear, and with travel impossible due to low rivers, formed long lines on riverbanks to receive relief supplies. In Manaus, the region's largest city, the more than 2 million residents choked for months on wildfire smoke.

Study co-author Regina Rodrigues, from Federal University of Santa Catarina, said the drought underscored the Amazon's importance in the fight against climate change.

"If we protect the forest, it will continue to act as the world's largest land-based carbon sink," Rodrigues said in a statement. "But if we allow human-induced emissions and deforestation to push it through the tipping point, it will release large amounts of carbon dioxide, further complicating our fight against climate change."

Luiz Candido, a meteorologist with Brazil's National Institute for Amazon Research, which didn't participate in the study, said the findings support the scientific consensus that climate variations in the region have escalated to extreme conditions.

But Candido also argued that interactions among the oceans, the atmosphere, and the forest are complex and it's not possible yet to separate the impacts of natural climate variability from those of human-induced global warming. He also questioned whether the study overestimated plant evaporation, noting that many Amazon plants are much deeper-rooted than crops and were able to retain much of their moisture by reaching damp, deeper layers.

UN agency: 119.8-degree reading in Sicily two years ago was Europe's highest temperature

SALVATORE CAVALLI

People enjoy time at the beach in Aci Trezza, near Catania, Sicily, Italy, Friday, Aug. 13, 2021.

GENEVA (AP)—The U.N.'s weather agency on Tuesday confirmed a reading of 48.8 degrees Celsius (119.8 degrees Fahrenheit) in Sicily two years ago as the hottest temperature ever recorded in Europe.

The World Meteorological Organization says the Sicilian scorcher was picked up on Aug. 11, 2021, at a time when temperatures were soaring across much of Europe—renewing concerns about climate change caused by human activity.

The figure blew past the previous European record of 48 C that was recorded in the Greek cities of Athens and Elefsina in July 1977.

The Sicily record from 2021 was based on weather observations and first published in the International Journal of Climatology.

Randall Cerveny, who reports on climate and weather extremes for the World Meteorological Organization, says the confirmation followed a lengthy investigation that required "meticulous care" by the agency.

"This investigation demonstrates the alarming tendency for continuing high temperature records to be set in specific regions of the world," Cerveny said.

Such evaluations are published in the Archive of Weather and Climate Extremes, which tallies records on extremes like the world's high and low temperatures, heaviest hail stone, maximum gust of wind, longest lightning flash and weather-related deaths.

Greta Thunberg joins UK protest vs. airport expansion for private planes

AP

In this photo issued by Extinction Rebellion UK, climate activist Greta Thunberg, third right, takes part in a march to Farnborough Airport in southern England, Saturday Jan. 27, 2024.

LONDON (AP)—Climate activist Greta Thunberg joined a march in southern England on Saturday to protest the use of private jets and the expansion of an airport.

Hundreds of local residents and activists holding banners and placards that read "Ban Private Jets" marched to Farnborough Airport, which mostly serves private aircraft. Some beat drums while others lit pink smoke flares.

The airport, located in Hampshire County about 40 miles (64 kilometers) southwest of London, applied last year to increase its maximum number of flights from 50,000 to 70,000 a year.

Groups working to fight climate change, including the organizer of Saturday's protest, Extinction Rebellion, say private jets are much more polluting than commercial passenger airliners. Flights to and from Farnborough Airport carried an average of 2½ passengers per flight in 2022, the group said.

"It is clear that private jets are incompatible with ensuring present and future living conditions on this planet," Thunberg said in a video that Extinction Rebellion posted on social media.

"We're not going to let this continue. We're not going to let the rich few who are responsible for the majority of aviation emissions get away with sacrificing people and the planet," she added.

Farnborough Airport said that it was an important hub for business and corporate travel, and that it recognized the importance of reducing its environmental impact.

"The airport's environmental footprint is a fraction that of a traditional commercial airport, yet it serves as one of the largest employment sites in the region," it said in a statement.

Thunberg, 21, a Swedish environmental campaigner who inspired a global youth movement against climate change, is expected to appear at a court in London next week to face a public order offense charge. She was arrested in October during a demonstration against a major oil and gas industry conference.

Thunberg was among the activists who were charged for seeking to block access to the Energy Intelligence Forum. She denied the charge.

Life & Style

Chita Rivera, revered Tony-winning dancer and singer, dies at 91

NEW YORK (AP)—Chita Rivera, the dynamic dancer, singer and actor who garnered 10 Tony nominations, winning twice, in a long Broadway career that forged a path for Latina artists and shrugged off a near-fatal car accident, died Tuesday. She was 91.

Rivera's death was announced by her daughter, Lisa Mordente, who said she died in New York after a brief illness.

Rivera first gained wide notice in 1957 as Anita in the original production of "West Side Story" and was still dancing on Broadway with her trademark energy a half-century later in 2015's "The Visit."

"I wouldn't know what to do if I wasn't moving or telling a story to you or singing a song," she told The Associated Press then. "That's the spirit of my life, and I'm really so lucky to be able to do what I love, even at this time in my life."

AP

Chita Rivera arrives at the 72nd annual Tony Awards at Radio City Music Hall on Sunday, June 10, 2018, in New York.

In August 2009, Rivera was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest honor the U.S. can give a civilian. Rivera put her hand over her heart and said she shook her head in wonderment as President Barack Obama presented the medal. In 2013, she was the marshal at the Puerto Rican Day Parade in New York City.

"She was a true Broadway legend," playwright Paul Rudnick said on X, formerly Twitter. "She always delivered and audiences adored her. The moment she stepped onstage, the world became more exciting and glorious."

Rivera rose from chorus girl to star, collaborating along the way with many of Broadway's greatest talents, including Jerome Robbins, Leonard Bernstein, Bob Fosse, Gower Champion, Michael Kidd, Harold Prince, Jack Cole, Peter Gennaro and John Kander and Fred Ebb.

She rebounded from a car accident in 1988 that crushed her right leg and became an indefatigable star on the road. She was on Broadway in a raucous production of "The Mystery of Edwin Drood" in 2012 and the chilly "The Visit" in 2014, earning another best actress Tony nomination.

"She can't rehearse except for full-out," said playwright Terrence McNally in 2005. "She can't perform except for full-out, no matter what the size of the house. She's going to be there 101% for that audience."

She won Tonys for "The Rink" in 1984 and "Kiss of the Spider Woman" in 1993. When accepting a Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2018, she said "I wouldn't trade my life in the theater for anything, because theater is life."

She was nominated for the award seven other times, for "Bye Bye Birdie," which opened in 1960; "Chicago," 1975; "Bring Back Birdie," 1981; "Merlin," 1983; "Jerry's Girls," 1985; "Nine," 2003; and "Chita Rivera: The Dancer's Life," 2005.

"I don't think we have enough original musicals," she told The Associated Press in 2012. "I know I'm being old fashioned, but the theater is the place where music, lyrics, words, scenery and stories come together. And I've been blessed enough to have done several shows when they really did. They take you places and they're daring. That's what we need."

Her albums include 16 tracks pulled from her original cast recordings and put out as part of Sony's Legends of Broadway series and two solo CDs—"And Now I Sing" for a tiny record label in the 1960s and "And Now I Swing" in 2009 for Yellow Sound Label.

"I looked up to you and always will admire you as a talent and mostly as a person!" wrote Kristin Chenoweth on X. "A kick butt woman you were. All the rest of us just wanna be you."

In the 1993 musical "Kiss of the Spider Woman," Rivera played the title role, a glamorous movie star at the center of the fantasy life of an inmate in a South American prison. The story, from a novel by Manuel Puig, had already been made into an Oscar-winning 1985 movie.

In his review, then-Associated Press drama critic Michael Kuchwara wrote that Rivera "is more than a musical theater star. She's a force of nature—which is exactly what is needed for the role of the Spider Woman. With her Louise Brooks haircut, brassy voice and lithe dancer's body, Rivera dominates the stage whenever she appears."

In 1975, she originated the role of Velma Kelly (to Gwen Verdon's Roxie Hart) in the original Broadway production of "Chicago." Rivera had a small role in the 2002 film version, while Catherine Zeta-Jones won the best supporting actress Oscar as Velma—just as Rita Moreno had picked up an Oscar for her portrayal of Anita in "West Side Story."

The songwriters for "Chicago," Kander and Ebb, also wrote Rivera's first Tony-winning performance, for "The Rink." In winning the Tony for best actress in a musical, Rivera topped the show's top star, Liza Minnelli, who also had been nominated. The two played a mother and daughter who struggle to rebuild their relationship after a long estrangement; the setting is an old-fashioned roller rink that has seen better days.

"Spider Woman" had been her first Broadway show since 1986, when she suffered a broken leg in the traffic accident while she was appearing in "Jerry's Girls," a Broadway tribute to the songs of Jerry Herman.

At the Tony awards a few weeks later, she flashed her cast and belted out "Put on a Happy Face" from the musical "Bye, Bye, Birdie."

It took months of physical therapy to bring back her dancing skills. She told The Associated Press: "It never entered my mind that I wouldn't dance again. Never. I can't explain to you why. It's hard work getting back but that's what I'm doing."

Friend consistently flakes out on social engagements

DEAR ABBY: I'm a widow. I have a friend I'll call "Greta," whom I have known since high school. I was very shy back then. She was more outgoing, but our group of friends was small. Over the years, I have become more outgoing, while Greta seems to be withdrawing socially.

She often tells me she will go to an event only if I go with her, but when I commit to it and pay for my part, she usually backs out. The problem is, Greta picks events I would otherwise not choose to attend or that none of my other friends are attending, so I must go alone or lose the money.

I'm about to retire, so I'll have less income. I am also working on widening my circle of friends so I can remain active. Greta wants to be invited and gets upset if I don't ask her to join me. However, she sees no problem with her constant no-shows.

This is putting a strain on our relationship and on my newly formed friendships. I feel guilty for moving on socially, but I'm afraid I'll end up isolated if I try to meet her demands. What can I do to meet my own needs and still maintain her friendship?

NAVIGATING FRIENDSHIP

DEAR NAVIGATING: You may not be able to do both. Have you pointed out to Greta that what she has been doing is unfair, not to mention expensive? If you haven't, do it now. If you have told her and have been ignored, remind her. When you do, express plainly that what she has been doing is rude, and if it happens again, you will no longer buy tickets for her events. Then step back and see her less often, and only one-on-one if you see her at all.

■ ■ ■

DEAR ABBY: My adult son suffered a nervous breakdown a couple of years ago. Ever since, he has been blaming me for all his problems. It was always important to me to be a good mother, and I tried to be. Now he claims I was "emotionally abusive." (I never tried to be abusive.) He has put me through hell the last couple of years with his nasty accusations. I don't know where it's coming from.

Abby, he blames me for everything bad in his life. I am upset and crying all the time. He used to be sweet, and we were extremely close. Now he says he doesn't want to see me unless I get therapy!

Everyone who knows me knows I would never hurt my son. It seems like he is going out of his way to hurt me. I think he needs to take responsibility for his own life and quit using me as his whipping post. Am I wrong? What should I do?

WOUNDED MOM IN WISCONSIN

DEAR MOM: I think you should agree to the therapy, but that it should be FAMILY therapy with a licensed mental health professional. Your son may (or may not) have some legitimate complaints, but it would be better if they were heard by an unbiased mediator.

I can't guarantee this will solve all the problems you're having with your troubled son, but it will give each of you the opportunity to hear where the other is coming from. After that, if the relationship doesn't improve, do what you must to protect your emotional well-being and stop communicating with him.

■ ■ ■

DEAR ABBY

By Abigail Van Buren
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

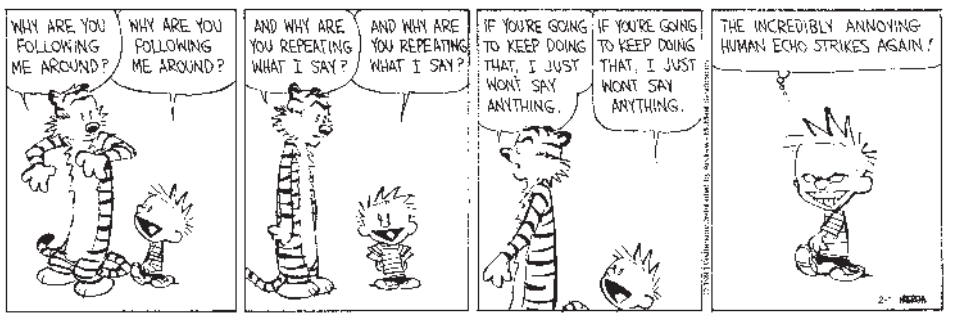
Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

To receive a collection of Abby's most memorable – and most frequently requested – poems and essays, send your name and mailing address, plus check or money order for $8 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby – Keepers Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Shipping and handling are included in the price.)

Pastimes

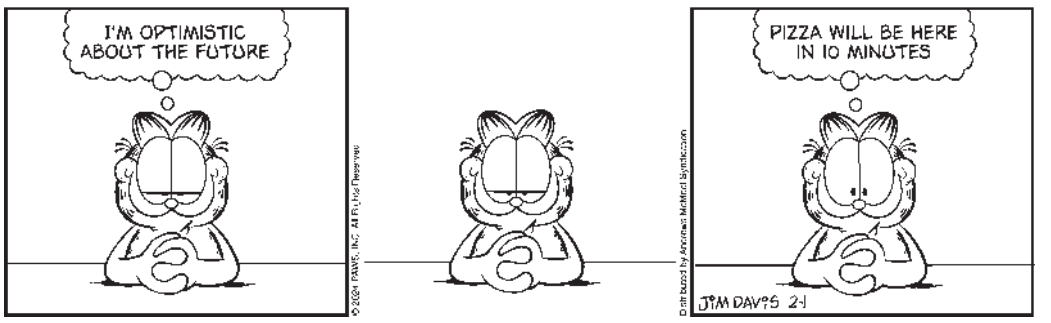
Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson


WHY ARE YOU FOLLOWING ME AROUND?
WHY ARE YOU FOLLOWING ME AROUND?
AND WHY ARE YOU REPEATING WHAT I SAY?
AND WHY ARE YOU REPEATING WHAT I SAY?
IF YOU'RE GOING TO KEEP DOING THAT, I JUST WON'T SAY ANYTHING.
IF YOU'RE GOING TO KEEP DOING THAT, I JUST WON'T SAY ANYTHING.
THE INCREDIBLY ANNOYING HUMAN ECHO STRIKES AGAIN!

Garfield®

By Jim Davis



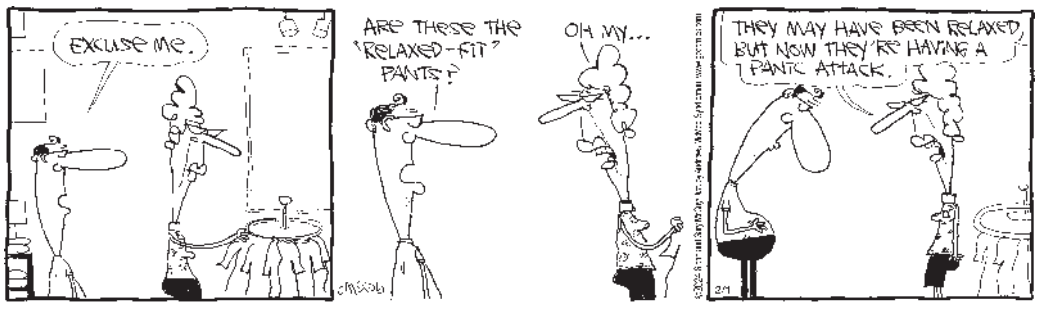
Adam@home

By Bryan Basset

OKAY. NOW I'M A LITTLE FREAKED OUT.
I TOLD YOU SNOW WEASELS WERE REAL!
AND...AND THEY'RE DANGEROUS, YOU SAY?
I HEARD A SNOW SHOVELER LOST A FOOT TO ONE LAST WEEK.
YOU'D THINK THE SHOVEL WOULD'VE BEEN A GOOD WEAPON.
VERY TOUGH NOGGINS, THE SNOW WEASELS HAVE.

The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy



CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

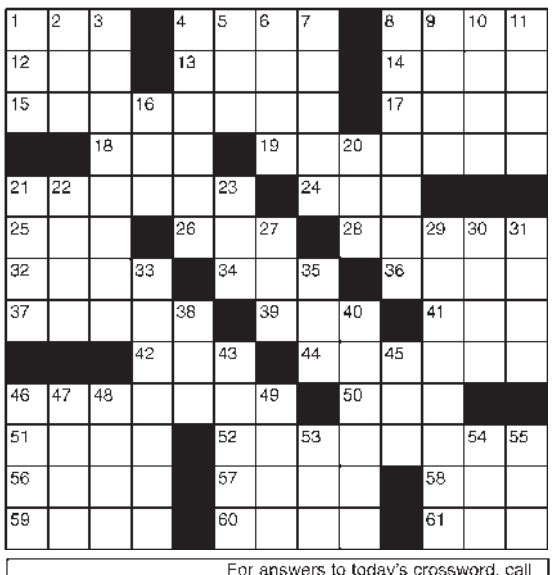
ACROSS
1 Pod veggie
4 Shapeless sci-fi villain
8 "Casablanca" role
12 Texter's "Enough!"
13 Nevada city
14 Repast
15 Maladies
17 Jab
18 Time line period
19 Maritime
21 Mock
24 "Do the Right Thing" pizzeria owner
25 "Evil Woman" band
26 Pouch
28 Western resort lake
32 — colada
34 Squabble
36 Easy targets
37 Nuisances
39 Used to be
41 Quibble
42 CNN founder Turner
44 Scottish port
46 Where earth meets sky
50 Neither mate
51 Exceeding
52 Postal nuisance
56 Glazier's sheet
57 Garfield's pal
58 Fury
59 Winter coaster
60 John and Yoko's son
61 Trail the pack

DOWN
1 School book fair org.
2 U.K. recording label
3 Parts of plane wings
4 Bakery loaves
5 Cariou of Broadway
6 Aware of
7 Autumn pears
8 Antelopes
9 Boxer Spinks
10 H.H. Munro's pen name
11 Mr. Guinness
16 X-ray's cousin
20 "Dig in!"
21 "Ed Wood" star
22 Writer Wiesel
23 Corn spike
27 Farm female
29 Staircase feature
30 Mayberry moppet
31 Town near Padua
33 Dressed
35 Bankroll
38 "— who?"
40 Submerged
43 Martial arts schools
45 Paris appellation
46 Beer ingredient
47 Cameo shape
48 Russo of "The Intern"
49 Art class subject
53 Actress Long
54 Playwright Levin
55 Table support

Solution time: 24 mins.

W	O	K		A	T	M	S		A	C	I	U
E	G	O		I	A	G	O		C	O	A	L
A	R	T		R	E	M	B	R	A	N	D	T
K	E	B	A	B			S	A	C			
			B	E	T	I		M	I	R	T	I
R	E	M	E	D	I	E	S		A	U	R	A
O	I	F		S	F	G	U	F		I	O	N
M	A	T	S		R	F	M	N	A	N	T	S
P	L	A	I	N		L	O	G	S			
			D	O	E			I	P	O	D	S
R	E	M	I	N	G	T	O	N		P	I	A
I	M	A	N		G	A	L	E		E	M	I
B	O	R	G		O	D	D	S		C	E	L

Yesterday's answer 2-1



STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call **1-900-226-5955**! 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Harry Styles, 30; Ronda Rousey, 37; Big Boi, 49; Michael C. Hall, 53.

Happy Birthday: Minimize risk, use common sense and get the facts before you proceed. Get the most out of your year by taking the time to justify your every move. Refuse to feel pressured by individuals trying to take advantage of you. A minimalist lifestyle will protect you from outside influences and offer you peace of mind and more time to enjoy nature, spirituality, personal growth and satisfaction. Your numbers are 5, 11, 22, 24, 31, 35, 46.

ARIES *(March 21-April 19)*: Stick close to your allies and experts you trust to remain knowledgeable. Be able to recognize when someone is trying to use you to get ahead. Don't let an emotional situation lead to anger, which will weaken your position. Do what you do best and flourish. ✪✪✪

TAURUS *(April 20-May 20)*: Put your energy into learning, discovery, and trial and error. Be a sponge, ask questions, hone your skills and prepare yourself to fight for what's important to you. Show confidence, and you will deter anyone trying to get a reaction they can benefit from. ✪✪✪

GEMINI *(May 21-June 20)*: Listen and modify what you learn to fit your situation. Research will disclose possibilities that can make your life easier. Don't let anyone convince you that you must take a path that makes you uneasy. Choose what works best for you. ✪✪✪✪

CANCER *(June 21-July 22)*: Take a break, give yourself a chance to review important details and rethink your strategy. You have plenty to gain if you know the possibilities and eliminate what's unnecessary. Use your imagination to picture what works best for you. ✪✪

LEO *(July 23-Aug. 22)*: Recognize what's happening around you. Refuse to let your emotions cause you to overreact. Avoid trouble, concentrate on your responsibilities and pay more attention to protecting what you have achieved. Don't get swept up in someone else's poor decisions. ✪✪

VIRGO *(Aug. 23-Sept. 22)*: Be succinct, choose your words wisely and don't waste energy on something inevitable. Dive in, make the necessary changes and reap the rewards you deserve. Step into the spotlight; take charge and present what you have to offer. It's time to make things happen. ✪✪✪✪

LIBRA *(Sept. 23-Oct. 22)*: Keep moving forward, regardless of what others say. An emotional incident can derail what you are trying to accomplish. Stick to your plans and refuse to make allowances for someone else's shortcomings. Persistence, detail and integrity will help eliminate unjust results. ✪✪✪

SCORPIO *(Oct. 23-Nov. 21)*: Don't get involved in no-win situations or one-sided conversations. Explore your options and determine how to make the most using what's available. An opportunity to share with someone in a similar predicament is apparent. ✪✪✪

SAGITTARIUS *(Nov. 22-Dec. 21)*: Mixed emotions will lead to confusion regarding a financial situation or professional position. Consider what action you can take to protect yourself from being taken advantage of by someone offering fake facts or using pressure tactics. ✪✪✪✪

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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CAPRICORN *(Dec. 22-Jan. 19)*: Refuse to let emotions interfere with decisions. Communication will suffer if it escalates into a shouting match. Get the facts and figures and choose to use common sense. It's OK to treat yourself, but don't go into debt for the sake of a moment's pleasure. ✪✪

AQUARIUS *(Jan. 20-Feb. 18)*: Keep tabs on subscriptions, updates and hidden costs. Go directly to the source when you find a discrepancy. Act rather than wait until you experience loss. Say no to temptation and change what isn't necessary. Overrule anyone trying to take over or interfere. ✪✪✪✪✪

PISCES *(Feb. 19-March 20)*: Protect your possessions and position. Live by the rules and adjust when necessary. It's up to you to set standards that keep you moving in the right direction. Don't let anyone lead you astray or compromise your position. Look for flaws and compensate for setbacks. ✪✪✪

Birthday Baby: You are direct, guarded and disciplined. You are influential and persistent.

✪: Avoid conflicts; work behind the scenes. ✪✪: You can accomplish, but don't rely on others. ✪✪✪: Focus and you'll reach your goals. ✪✪✪✪: Aim high; start new projects. ✪✪✪✪✪: Nothing can stop you; go for gold.

SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku *By Dave Green*

			5		2		8	4
		6				5		
		4			8			7
		5					9	
	4	2		5	1			
	1		4	9				2
						8		
	6	8			7		3	
	2			8		1		9

Difficulty: ★★★ 2/1

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Yesterday's Answer

6	2	9	8	1	4	7	5	3
5	1	3	7	2	6	8	4	9
8	7	4	9	3	5	1	2	6
1	6	8	5	7	9	2	3	4
2	3	7	4	6	1	5	9	8
4	9	5	3	8	2	6	1	7
9	8	2	1	4	7	3	6	5
3	5	6	2	9	8	4	7	1
7	4	1	6	5	3	9	8	2

Difficulty: ★★★ 2/1

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WONDERWORD

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the **WONDERWORD.**

HAVE ANY MSG TODAY? **Solution: 10 letters**

M	A	I	N	E	Z	O	R	F	L	E	B	A	L	T
A	U	N	B	O	U	I	L	L	O	N	A	G	A	A
Y	T	I	C	D	R	A	T	S	U	M	R	L	T	E
O	O	R	D	H	V	N	F	O	O	D	B	U	N	M
N	L	E	O	O	O	B	O	X	E	D	E	T	E	H
N	Y	T	R	F	S	V	G	L	N	T	C	A	M	C
A	Z	A	W	N	E	O	I	R	U	U	U	M	M	N
I	E	W	A	E	N	U	N	E	T	N	E	A	E	U
S	D	C	H	I	T	O	Q	O	S	A	L	T	Y	L
E	K	E	O	O	M	S	T	O	M	T	I	E	A	B
S	S	N	N	L	T	A	P	E	R	M	E	R	E	J
A	S	E	A	N	M	D	A	U	R	E	U	E	D	E
U	I	S	E	O	A	T	O	A	O	T	F	E	B	R
C	N	T	T	H	S	C	M	G	A	S	I	A	N	K
E	S	M	A	L	C	O	R	N	S	A	V	O	R	Y

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Anchovies, Asian, Autolyzed, Barbecue, Beef, Beets, Bouillon, Boxed, Canned, Cheese, Clams, Corn, Deli, Emmental, Flavor, Food, Frozen, Glutamate, Hot Dogs, Jerky, Label, Lunch Meat, Marmite, Mayonnaise, Meats, Monosodium, Mustard, Natural, Nuts, Onions, Roquefort, Salmon, Salty, Sauce, Savory, Snacks, Soups, Stew, Tomato, Tuna, Water

Yesterday's Answer: Palm Leaves

The NEW **Treasury 57** can be purchased online at www.WonderWordBooks.com, or call 1-800-642-6480. (In Canada, call 1-855-232-2367)

Tatum scores 30 as Celtics beat Pacers, 129-124

BOSTON (AP)—The Celtics have won plenty of games this season by overpowering teams with their offense.

They reminded the Pacers they are just as elite on the defensive end.

Jayson Tatum scored 30 points and had two blocks in the final 30 seconds to help Boston hold off Indiana 129-124 on Tuesday night.

"You have to be able to win games with your defense," coach Joe Mazzulla said.

He said wins like this will teach his team not to lean too heavy on its offense.

"It's a tough balance for us because we always talk about how the game's connected. You can't have one without the other," Mazzulla said. "But there's moments when they both have to be elite. We had really good defense down the stretch and made some winning plays."

Jaylen Brown added 25 points and Derrick White finished with 24 as Boston claimed the season series with Indiana, 3-2. The Pacers eliminated the Celtics in the quarterfinal round of the In-Season Tournament in December.

Aaron Nesmith led the Pacers with 26 points and 12 rebounds. Pascal Siakam finished with 23 points and Myles Turner added 17. All-Star Tyrese Haliburton had 13 points on 5-of-16 shooting and 10 rebounds after sitting out the previous five games with a strained left hamstring.

The Celtics led by 20 points late in the first half, but Indiana rallied and trailed 127-124 when White blocked a tying 3-point attempt by Nesmith. Tatum then denied an attempt by Turner at the rim with 29.3 seconds left, leading to a shot-clock violation.

Jrue Holiday extended Boston's lead with two free throws. Nesmith pushed the ball up the floor and Tatum was called for a foul with 11.2 seconds on the clock as he appeared to cleanly block the shot. Boston challenged the call, and the foul was overturned after review.

Holiday said the Celtics got a reminder that they'll have to find different ways to close out opponents.

"We've got to be able to fight through everything," he said. "Fight through expectations. Fight through being up 20 and somebody having a great third quarter and finishing games. If it was easy the whole time, what's the fun in that?"

After stumbling at the start of the teams' two previous outings, the Celtics came out energized.

Kristaps Porzingis returned to the lineup after missing two games with a sprained left ankle. His presence inside kept Indiana honest defensively and helped Boston's shooters spread the Pacers out. It produced open looks for the Celtics, who knocked down 17 3s on the night. Porzingis finished with 17 points and 12 rebounds.

Holiday also had 17 points. It was the third time this season the starting five of Tatum, Brown, White, Holiday and Porzingis all scored 17 or more.

The Pacers went on a 25-10 run in the third quarter to regain the lead at 94-93. Boston responded over the final 4:11 of the period, ending it with Neemias Queta's dunk off a pass from Tatum to give the Celtics a 106-103 edge entering the fourth.

The Celtics surged to begin the final period, using a 16-9 run to build a 122-112 cushion with just over five minutes to play.

AP

Boston Celtics' Jayson Tatum (0) shoots against Indiana Pacers' Aaron Nesmith (23) and Jalen Smith (25) during the first half of an NBA basketball game, Tuesday, Jan. 30, 2024, in Boston.

WARRIORS 119, 76ERS 107

SAN FRANCISCO (AP)—Stephen Curry had 37 points with eight 3-pointers, Jonathan Kuminga had 26 points and Golden State beat Philadelphia on a night when guard Klay Thompson sat out with an illness.

Curry, who also had eight rebounds and seven assists, shot 12 for 17 in his third straight 30-point game.

Andrew Wiggins added 23 points, five rebounds and four assists.

Tobias Harris had 26 points and 10 rebounds and Joel Embiid scored 14 points for the Sixers before limping to the locker room with 4:04 left after Kuminga fell on his left knee.

KNICKS 118, JAZZ 103

NEW YORK (AP)—Donte DiVincenzo made a career-high nine 3-pointers and scored 33 points, Jalen Brunson had 29 points and nine assists, and New York wrapped up one of the best months in franchise history with its eighth straight victory.

The Knicks finished 14-2 in January. That was their most wins in a month since going 14-0 in March 1994 and just one shy of their most ever, when they were 15-3 in December 1968.

Collin Sexton scored 22 points for Utah, which lost in New York for the second straight night to finish its road trip at 2-4. The Jazz were beaten 147-114 by Brooklyn on Monday.

With starting Knicks forwards Julius Randle and OG Anunoby sidelined for the second straight night, Precious Achiuwa matched a season high with 18 points. Josh Hart finished with 10 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists, and Isaiah Hartenstein had 14 points and 12 boards.

HAWKS 138, LAKERS 122

ATLANTA (AP)—Trae Young scored 26 points, knocking down his first six attempts from 3-point range, and the Atlanta handed Los Angeles its second double-digit loss in as many nights.

The Lakers, playing without Anthony Davis after a 135-119 loss at Houston on Monday, slipped back below .500 at 24-25. Austin Reaves scored 28 points and James added 20 in a lackluster performance before a standing-room-only crowd.

Dejounte Murray, who had 24 points for the Hawks, knocked down mid-range jumpers on three straight possessions midway through the fourth quarter to turn back any thoughts of a Lakers comeback.

RAPTORS 118, BULLS 107

CHICAGO (AP)—Gary Trent Jr. scored 24 points, Bruce Brown added 19 points and seven rebounds, and short-handed Toronto rallied past Chicago to snap a season-high five-game skid.

Jordan Nwora scored 17 points in 19 minutes and Dennis Schroder added 16 points and 10 assists for the Raptors, who trailed by 16 in the second quarter but regained the lead late in the third and held on from there.

DeMar DeRozan led the Bulls with 25 points and Ayo Dosunmu had 21. Chicago has lost three of four.

An All-Star shooting showdown: Stephen Curry vs. Sabrina Ionescu is happening

By TIM REYNOLDS
AP BASKETBALL WRITER

Stephen Curry is headed back to NBA All-Star weekend. Sabrina Ionescu will be waiting for him.

The shootout that both of them wanted is officially a reality, the NBA announced Tuesday. "Stephen vs. Sabrina" will happen as part of All-Star Saturday Night in Indianapolis on Feb. 17. Curry, the NBA's all-time 3-point king, will take on the reigning WNBA 3-point shootout queen and single-season record holder Ionescu.

"Stage is set! Let's get it," Curry posted on social media.

Ionescu responded simply: "Let's go!"

This matchup was months in the making. Curry was wired with a microphone for Golden State's game last Thursday night against Sacramento and had a discussion with Warriors teammate Brandin Podziemski about Ionescu, who scored an almost-perfect 37 points in the WNBA's 3-point contest last summer. That topped Curry's NBA 3-point contest best of 31.

"I think I've got to challenge her," Curry told Podziemski.

Ionescu responded on social media: "Let's gettttt it!! See ya at the 3 pt line." In fact, she technically initiated the challenge: Ionescu posed for a photo imitating Curry's famous lights-out pose while holding her trophy at the WNBA All-Star event and raised the possibility of a matchup.

The NBA was more than happy to make it happen.

Curry will shoot from the NBA 3-point line with NBA basketballs, and Ionescu will shoot from the WNBA 3-point line with WNBA basketballs. At stake: bragging rights and a lot of cash for charity—Curry's Eat.Learn.Play. nonprofit and Ionescu's SI20 Foundation will receive a donation from the NBA and WNBA for participating. Every shot they make—$1,000 for regular 3s, $2,000 for money-ball 3s and $3,000 for deeper 3s from nearly 30 feet—will bring a donation from State Farm to the NBA Foundation "to support economic empowerment in the Black community," the league said.

Curry has four of the five highest single-season 3-point totals in NBA history, with his record of 402 coming in the 2015-16 season. Ionescu led the WNBA with 128 3s last season, while shooting nearly 45% from distance.

"I'm envisioning a Bobby Riggs versus Billie Jean King from 1973, so maybe it's the modern-day battle of the sexes," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "I know those two are close. Sabrina being from the bay, we've seen her at our games before and everybody loves her and pulls for her. So it'll be fun to see them shooting against each other."

RISING STARS

No surprise here: Victor Wembanyama is headed to his first All-Star weekend.

The San Antonio rookie and No. 1 overall pick in last year's NBA draft was one of 28 players picked for the Rising Stars games, to be held on the Friday of All-Star weekend, Feb. 16.

No. 2 pick Brandon Miller of Charlotte and No. 3 pick Scoot Henderson of Portland are joining Wembanyama among the rookies selected for the games—the format is a mini-tournament with the seven-player rosters, and a championship game after two semifinals. Henderson is in the event for a third time, after being picked twice when he played for the G League Ignite in 2022 and 2023.

Also picked from the rookie class was Oklahoma City teammates Chet Holmgren and Cason Wallace, Washington's Bilal Coulibaly, Utah's Keyonte George, New Orleans' Jordan Hawkins, Miami's Jaime Jaquez Jr., Dallas' Dereck Lively II and Golden State's Podziemski.

From the second-year class are Orlando's Paolo Banchero, New Orleans' Dyson Daniels, Detroit teammates Jalen Duren and Jaden Ivey, Utah's Walker Kessler, Indiana's Bennedict Mathurin, Sacramento's Keegan Murray, Portland's Shaedon Sharpe, Houston's Jabari Smith Jr. and Oklahoma City's Jalen Williams.

Reigning slam dunk champion Mac McClung was one of seven G League players picked for the event, along with Izan Almansa, Matas Buzelis, Ron Holland, Tyler Smith, Oscar Tshiebwe and Alondes Williams.

Guerrero Jr. looking forward to setting arbitration record win or lose

TORONTO (AP)—Although he's never gone through the process before, Vladimir Guerrero Jr. doesn't seem too unsettled about the possibility of his 2024 salary being decided by a three-person arbitration panel.

That's probably because whether Guerrero wins or loses, the Blue Jays slugger stands to set a record for the highest salary ever awarded in arbitration.

Guerrero has asked for $19.9 million and been offered $18.05 million, meaning he's guaranteed to top the $14 million former Toronto teammate Teoscar Hernández received from Seattle after Hernández lost his hearing last year.

"I feel very happy," Guerrero said through a translator in an interview to promote his appearance on the cover of the 2024 edition of the video game MLB The Show.

"I feel even more happy because he's my good friend, and now I can give him a hard time about it," Guerrero said.

Guerrero and Hernández were Blue Jays teammates for four seasons, reaching the playoffs together in 2020 and 2022.

A three-time All-Star and the reigning Home Run Derby champion, Guerrero said he's made some minor mechanical adjustments to his swing this offseason after a second straight year of declining productivity. He set career-highs with 48 home runs and 111 RBIs in 2021, then followed up with 32 homers and 97 RBIs in 2022. Guerrero had 26 homers and 94 last season.

"I improved my mechanics to have as little movement as possible," Guerrero said. "To the naked eye, you might not even notice. I can tell the difference because I can feel it."

AP

Toronto Blue Jays' Vladimir Guerrero Jr. celebrates his two-run home run against the Texas Rangers during the first inning of a baseball game Thursday, Sept. 14, 2023, in Toronto.

Toronto earned its second straight wild card and third in four seasons but did not win a game in any of those October appearances. Toronto scored just one run in a two-game sweep at Minnesota, extending a playoff drought that dates to 2016, when the Blue Jays lost 4-1 to Cleveland in the AL Championship Series.

After missing out on Shohei Ohtani, the Blue Jays have been quiet so far this offseason, adding former Gold Glove winners in outfielder Kevin Kiermaier and infielder/outfielder Isiah Kiner-Falefa. The Blue Jays have a pending $13 million, one-year deal with third baseman Justin Turner.

"I'm happy with the team," Guerrero said. "I'm concentrating more on my game and making sure I'm putting my best foot forward."

Toronto had made bigger changes in its coaching ranks, moving Don Mattingly from bench coach to offensive coordinator, hiring Carlos Febles as third base coach and DeMarlo Hale as associate manager, and promoting Matt Hague from Triple-A Buffalo to serve as assistant hitting coach.

Guerrero said he has high hopes for a bounce-back season from right-hander Alek Manoah. The 2022 AL Cy Young Award finalist was demoted to the rookie-level Florida Complex League last June after going 1-7 with a 6.36 ERA. Manoah went 2-2 with a 4.91 ERA in seven starts after rejoining the big league roster in July, then didn't pitch again at any level after being optioned to Triple-A in August.

"I'm excited for his return," Guerrero said. "Obviously he's had his lows and his highs as a pitcher but he's always giving it his all, and I really like that about him."

After Toronto's playoff exit last October, general manager Ross Atkins said Manoah had received an injection to relieve discomfort in his shoulder, and that multiple tests had revealed no structural damage.

World Series MVP Seager to miss most of spring after his sports hernia surgery

AP

Texas Rangers' Corey Seager rounds the bases after hitting a solo home run during a baseball game against the Minnesota Twins, Friday, Sept. 1, 2023, in Arlington, Texas.

By STEPHEN HAWKINS
AP BASEBALL WRITER

World Series MVP Corey Seager had surgery Tuesday for a left sports hernia repair, and the Texas Rangers' All-Star shortstop will miss most of spring training.

General manager Chris Young said the operation was performed by Dr. Venkata Evani in Arizona, where the team holds spring training. Young, who described his level of concern as "very low," said Seager will remain in Arizona to begin his rehabilitation and the Rangers are hopeful he will be ready by opening day.

"I'm not going to commit to a hard timeline," Young said. "The hope is that by the end of spring, he'll have resumed baseball activity and will be pretty close to full speed at that point."

Young said the hernia issue came up during the postseason, when Seager was managing it with minor treatment in the trainer's room, though it didn't impact his play as the Rangers won their first World Series title. The original hope was that the issue would subside after extended rest during the offseason.

"It was manageable. The thought was, may continue to be manageable, but there is the chance that it continues to get worse," Young said. "The fact that he's still feeling it at this point, became pretty clear that this may be difficult to manage and at some point would likely need to be repaired."

Seager hit .318 with six homers, 12 RBIs and 15 walks in 17 postseason games last year. He homered three times in the World Series against Arizona, including a tying drive in the ninth inning of the opener.

In the regular season, the second of his $325 million, 10-year contract with Texas, the 29-year-old Seager batted .327 with 33 homers and 96 RBIs in 119 games. His batting average ranked second in the American League, and he led the AL with 42 doubles.

The shortstop missed 40 games because of two stints on the injured list last year. He was out 31 games after straining his left hamstring two weeks into the season, and missed nine games with a sprained right thumb before returning Aug. 2 with a homer in his first at-bat back in the lineup.

"Nothing amazes me with him and his ability to roll out of bed and hit," Young said. "He's such an important player to our team and our franchise. We want to make sure we get this right, and when Corey is ready to be back out there, he will be back out there."

Texas opens the regular season at home March 28 against the Chicago Cubs.

D-backs add Joc Pederson, who is intrigued with his new team's speed, youth and power

PHOENIX (AP)—Joc Pederson watched the Arizona Diamondbacks' surprise run to the World Series last fall and didn't see a whole lot of luck.

Instead, he witnessed a fascinating mix of skill, youth and chaos. He liked it so much he wanted to join in.

Pederson and the National League champion D-backs finalized a $9.5 million, one-year contract on Tuesday that includes a mutual option for 2025. The sides agreed to financial terms last week.

"They've always done the little things right and now they've added young superstars that are changing the game, stealing bases, hitting homers," Pederson said. "They're electric out there and I want to be a part of it."

The 31-year-old slugger has been a consistent power threat for a decade, with 186 career home runs for the Dodgers, Cubs, Braves and Giants. The left-handed-hitting outfielder was an All-Star with Los Angeles in 2015 and San Francisco in 2022 but wasn't as productive last season, batting .235 with 15 homers for the Giants.

He's won a pair of World Series titles, with the Dodgers in 2020 and Braves in 2021. Now he'll try to make it back to the Fall Classic on a roster that includes reigning NL Rookie of the Year Corbin Carroll and ace right-hander Zac Gallen, who was the starting pitcher for the NL All-Star team and finished third in NL Cy Young Award voting.

The D-backs developed a reputation last season for being unpredictable and aggressive on the basepaths. They were one of the teams that took full advantage of MLB's new rules package that encouraged more action, stealing 166 bases, which ranked second in the big leagues.

The team used an "Embrace the Chaos" slogan for much of the season.

Arizona general manager Mike Hazen said adding a left-handed power bat like Pederson's was a good fit for a roster that should already have ample right-handed power with Christian Walker, Lourdes Gurriel Jr. and Eugenio Suárez. The GM added that Pederson would be a good option for designated hitter, but could also compete for time in the outfield.

Pederson is quite familiar with the D-backs after spending most of his career in the NL West.

"I've always appreciated his energy and competitiveness from across the field," Hazen said. "It seems like he's worn us out. He's been in the division for so long, see him all the time, it's good to have him on our side."

Pederson is the latest addition to the Diamondbacks, who have been active this winter as they try to make it back to the World Series after losing to Texas last fall. They signed left-hander Eduardo Rodriguez to an $80 million, four-year deal and re-signed Gurriel to a $42 million, three-year contract.

Arizona also acquired Suárez this offseason in a trade with the Seattle Mariners.

Masters Preseason Basketball League this Saturday

By LEIGH GASES
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REPORTER

It's time for the masters to lace up their basketball shoes as the NMIBF Masters Preseason Basketball League is set for this Saturday, Feb. 3, 6:30pm at the Gilbert C. Ada Gymnasium.

The game between Latte Built and A Plus Team is right after the NMIBF Marianas Arsenal 3x3 Basketball Series finals.

Currently, there are five teams—Latte Built, A Plus Team, Old Aces, OG Aces, and Hoopaholics.

Northern Mariana Islands Basketball Federation president James Lee said that it is just a preseason internal league, so there won't be any trophies, playoffs, or finals. There is no entrance fee, but all players will pay $4 per game on a "pay-to-play" basis.

AP

The NMIBF Masters Preseason Basketball League is set to start this Saturday, Feb. 3, 6:30pm at the Gilbert C. Ada Gymnasium.

It will be a round-robin format for the five teams, then will be open to teams that want to join. It will restart another round-robin again, then repeat until mid-August for the actual start of the season.

Teams interested need to submit their waiver forms and roster to the NMIBF. Players need to be 40 years old and above, and need to have at least the same color top with number for their team uniforms.

Lee is inviting all masters players—40 and above—to come out and play.

The rest of the schedule has yet to be fixed, but the next game after this should be on Saturday, Feb. 10, also at the Gilbert C. Ada Gymnasium.

Quest improves to 3-0 this season

After 15 games of competition, only one team remains undefeated in the 2024 Rocball League at the Marianas High School Gymnasium. Quest has won all three of their games. Topshakaz, Border Control, Spicey Locals, Bolley Ballerz, and Nesian Power have lost one game each. Aces and Baddie-Z have two losses each and Chagii Fahn and RRA are as of yet winless.

In Round 3, the Bolley Ballers defeated the Aces, 33-19; Quest defeated RRA, 53-29; Topshakaz defeated Nesian Power, 21-13; Border Control defeated Chagii Fahn, 57-23, and Spicey Locals defeated Baddie-Z, 38-34.

The Heavy Hitters after the third round of play are Miguel Castro of RRA with nine two-point ace serves, Yeshqiah Coleman of Topshakaz with three two-point xunk serves, Anciade Reinder of RRA with two two-point backcourt kee plays, and Jerome Manzon of Baddie-Z with four three-point goals. ***(PR)***

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Spicey Locals currently has a record of 2-1 in the 2024 Rocball League at the Marianas High School Gymnasium.

Panthers coach Dave Canales co-wrote book about infidelity, binge drinking, addiction to pornography

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP)—Dave Canales is ready to begin his journey as head coach of the Carolina Panthers 16 months after co-authoring a faith-based book about working through problems with his sexual infidelity, addiction to pornography and binge drinking.

The book "This Marriage? The Question That Changed Everything" was written by Canales and his wife, Lizzy. It details how the 42-year-old coach has worked to overcome his problems and the couple found its way back to a healthy, Christian-based marriage.

Canales wrote that with the help of counseling and family, he no longer has issues with infidelity or pornography and he has stopped drinking completely.

Canales published the book in September 2022 when he was still a position coach with the Seattle Seahawks and before he got his big break and became offensive coordinator for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 2023, leaving him one step from becoming a head coach.

The couple said they wrote the book to help other couples struggling with marriage.

"We wanted other people to feel safe starting this journey toward a vibrant marriage by helping them see they are not alone," the couple wrote in the book's preface.

The couple said writing the book and reliving the painful details of their past was like going through another round of counseling, but it helped them "find renewed healing and hope through a stronger understanding of what happened."

The Panthers said they were aware of the book before hiring Canales last week.

A team spokesman said Canales would not be available for comment until his introductory news conference in Charlotte on Thursday.

Canales wrote in the book about how he finally made some "dark confessions" about his infidelity to his wife.

"A huge part in the severed intimacy that I was experiencing with Lizzy was because I was addicted to pornography," Canales wrote. "It was like a gateway drug for me, creating pathways in my brain that allowed me to use sex coldly for my own benefit. It was a secret, silent struggle that I had years before I was married."

He also wrote about how he cheated on Lizzy one month before they were married.

"From the start of our relationship, I was binge drinking and going out with friends, without Lizzy," Canales wrote. "Before I was ever unfaithful to her, I was already there in my mind. Bad habits combined with addiction made it hard for me to resist temptation. It was a pattern I knew well before we started dating."

Canales also described himself as a "recovering narcissist," and detailed how he had to work hard at "developing the skills necessary to be aware beyond myself and my needs."

As for his issues with drinking, Canales wrote: "I quit drinking alcohol altogether, knowing that I do not have great restraint in that area, and it numbs me to making other poor choices."

He described how early in his marriage, despite going to church, he would go out at times with friends and take off his wedding ring on certain occasions and act as though he wasn't married.

Canales said the long hours as an NFL assistant coach weren't to blame for his issues but gave him more opportunities to make bad decisions.

The couple wrote the book knowing that exposing their painful and highly personal secrets and issues could potentially hinder Canales' ability to land future jobs in the NFL. They said their marriage now is stronger than ever and their belief in God has helped them, discussing the importance of faith and prayer.

Lizzy Canales wrote in the book that meant essentially burning down the old marriage while bringing forth something entirely new from the ashes.

"Many are shocked when we tell them," the couple wrote. "For some it is incredibly uncomfortable and maybe even convicting. For others it is like a breath of fresh air and an invitation to go deeper into their own relationships."

The couple have four children.

In the book's foreword, former NFL coach Tony Dungy wrote: "Unlike so many couples today, they didn't let their marriage wither away. They wouldn't let it go. So instead, David and Lizzy resolved to get things back on the right track and rediscover that sense of purpose and that intimacy they had at the beginning. I'm happy to let you know they have done just that."

BUSY

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hope to include Rota and Tinian in the very near future."

Reflecting on the past year, Andrew said it was one of the best years they've had so far and it would not be possible without the generous support of the community and their families.

"I would like to sincerely thank everyone in our community for their support of our paddling programs, and we would not be able to dedicate time and effort if it wasn't for the untiring commitment and support of our families—thank you so much families," he said. "The dedication and commitments of our athletes, and coaches is worthy of mention as they all work day in and day out to keep the sports of outrigger paddling alive."

Lastly, Andrew gave special thanks to the NMNPSF board for all their time and efforts in making things happen for our membership. 2024 will be a repeat of 2023 but a little busier with a few big tickets on our calendar—and we look forward to seeing more interested paddlers come out to join the safe and fun sport of paddling. As we begin 2024 and finalize our calendar of events, we look to the heavens for all the blessings to allow us to have a fun and successful year full of paddling activities.

NICHOLAS

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me was my putting. The winds were quite strong so getting on the green was a challenge for me. But the flat stick really saved me those two rounds," he said.

The former Saipan Little League slugger said the weather was good on Day 1 of the tourney, but was drastically different on Day 2.

"It was quite windy, but it was decent on the first day. On the second day, the winds were much stronger. Furthermore, it was quite rainy on the front nine. But the rain cleared by the back nine, however, the winds were still there."

Relief was his initial reaction after topping the first qualifier of RGA's season-ending Ace of Aces Tournament.

"It means a lot. I expect it to be competitive. I know the association is filled with some talented golfers. So, I know all the future ace winners will be hungry to win."

Nicholas dedicated his win to his family, friends, fellow RGA members, and his old Sakati Golf Crew.

"I joined RGA because I know a bunch of the golfers in the association. I knew it was competitive. So, I joined to challenge myself as a golfer," he said when asked why he joined the established club.

In the closest to the pin competition, Joe "Kamikaze" Camacho won hole No. 3 and No. 17, while Zhi Yun"Venom" Li beat everyone in hole No. 13. Newly installed RGA president Marco Peter was supreme in hole No. 13.

Tatum scores 30 as Celtics beat Pacers, 129-124.

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Sports

Masters Preseason Basketball League this Saturday.

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Defending champs SIS survive 1st MS v-ball game

By LEIGH GASES
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REPORTER

The defending champs Saipan International School Geckos survived their first day back on the volleyball courts after taking the win in a deciding third set of the NMIVA-PSS Interscholastic Boys Middle School Volleyball League 2023-2024.

The Geckos went up against Tanapag Middle School Tatagas in a rowdy Marianas High School Gymnasium last Tuesday and lost the first set, 16-21. It must have been nerves as the Geckos regained their composure and proceeded to bring the Tatagas to their knees in the second set.

Hard-spiking Theo Joab smacked kills that the Tatagas could not get to and was complemented by untouchable aces by Landon Springer. While the Tatagas' momentum was shot, the Geckos went on overdrive to win the second set, 21-8, and force a tie-breaker.

The Tatagas regrouped and the third set was full of back and forth action, but the Geckos' rotation that included Joab, Springer, Jude Rayphand, Kanoa Owens, William Guo, Landon Pudney, and Jin Hyun Felix Choi, held them down long enough, 15-11, to take their first win of the season.

TMS is made up of Ali Santos, Benigno Sablan, Christopher Sablan, Collin Maratita, Damien Santos, Derence Benjamin, Justin Garde, Selah Coleman, Aiken Norita, Leeon Neth, Dyson Danis, and Carl Hocog.

In other results, Hopwood Middle School II just slipped past Francisco M. Sablan Middle School II in another three tough sets, 12-21, 21-14, 16-14; Chacha Ocean View Middle School bested SIS II, 21-11, 22-20; TMS II routed Dandan Middle School II, 21-8, 21-17; Mount Carmel School edged Grace Christian Academy, 6-21, 21-16, 15-10; and FMS defeated DMS 21-17, 21-16.

LEIGH GASES

Saipan International School's Landon Springer goes for an overhead serve during the second set of their game against Tanapag Middle School in the NMIVA-PSS Interscholastic Boys Middle School Volleyball League 2023-2024 at the Marianas High School Gymnasium last Tuesday.

Nicholas wins RGA January tourney

By MARK RABAGO
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EDITOR

Cameron Nicholas topped the two-day Refaluwasch Golf Association January Ace of the Month Tournament held last Jan. 14 and 27 at the Laolao Bay Golf & Resort.

The 31-year-old Legislative Bureau staff shot a two-round net score total of 147 (74-73) to win the club's first tournament of the year.

Nicholas actually secured the win on Round 2 by firing two birdies in the back nine on holes No. 12 and 18.

Joseph Sasamoto Jr. came in second with a 152 (80-72), while Patrick Fitial completed the Top 3 with his 155 (75-80).

Nicholas, who pocketed $55 for topping the tourney, said he was just happy to win the RGA January Ace of the Month Tournament.

"What really worked for

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Cameron Nicholas topped Refaluwasch Golf Association's January Ace of the Month Tournament held last Jan. 14 and 27 at the Laolao Bay Golf & Resort.

'Busy and super fun' 2023 for va'a

By LEIGH GASES
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REPORTER

The CNMI athletes out in the water who call it their second home had a "busy and super fun year," according to the Northern Marianas National Paddle Sports Federation president Justin Andrew.

Paddlers tested the waters and raced in local and regional competition, as well as competing in the 2023 Pacific Games in Solomon Islands last November. Besides that, they successfully hosted another season of the Public School System Interscholastic High School Outrigger Race.

With a year full of experience that tested veteran paddlers and young up-and-coming paddlers alike, Andrew rated the year a seven on a 1-10 scale. He said, "although we did very well in regional competitions, we still have work to do to be competitive in international competitions, and that reflects our development programs to include local races and training."

As 2023 was a busy year, Andrew said 2024 will be even busier. They are close to finalizing their sports calendar and hope to achieve the following: Host more local races, including the annual PSS Interscholastic Outrigger race; send athletes to the Micronesian Games in the Marshall Islands in June; send athletes (club level) to the World Sprints in Hilo, Hawaii in August; host the Annual Micronesia Cup in October, which Andrew said, "we are excited and look forward to this year's hosting since our last hosting was in 2012."

To add to all that, they also want to "collaborate with and to strengthen our private/public partnership including non-profit organizations to introduce the sports of paddling to promote health and wellness in our island community—and we also

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LEIGH GASES

The CNM national va'a team poses for a photo in Honiara, Solomon Islands during the 2023 Pacific Games last November.